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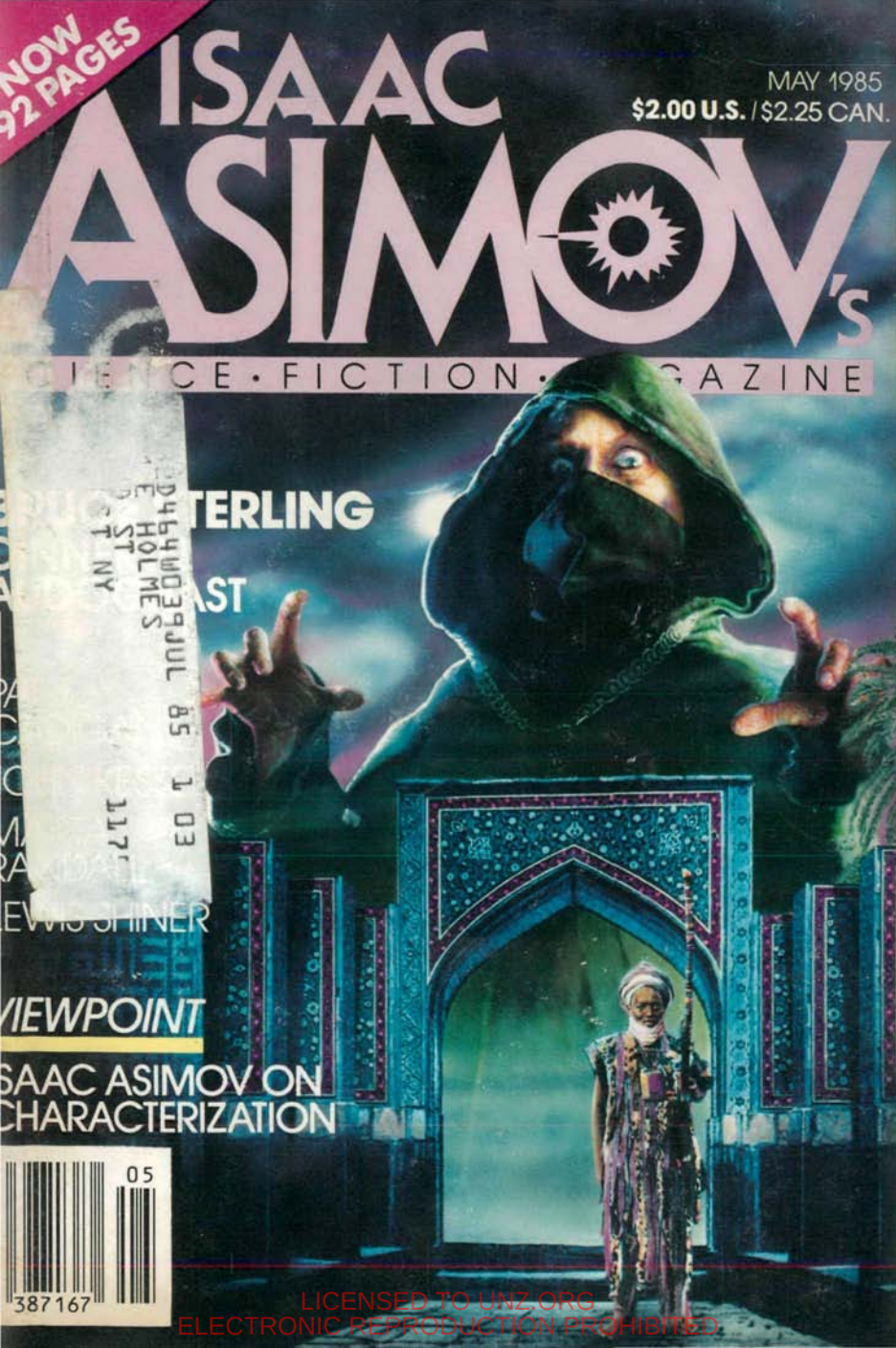

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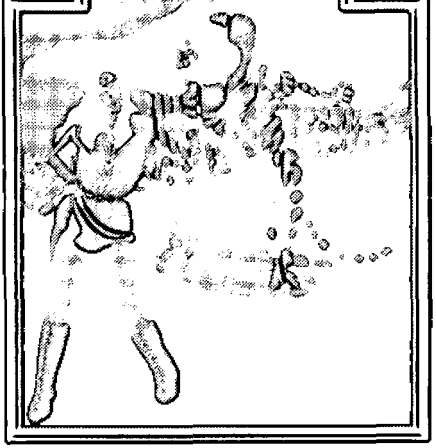

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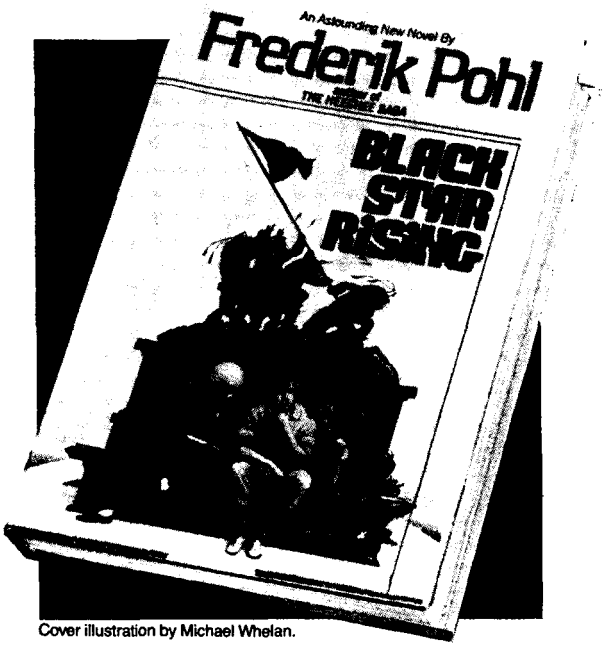

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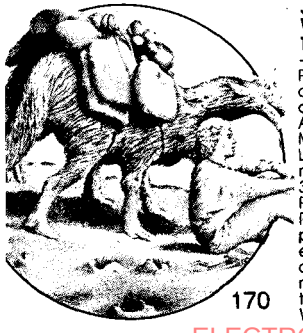

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EDITORIAL

MOONSHINE

by Isaac Asimov

When I was very young, I read a number of stories and saw several motion pictures which featured some unfortunate individual who tended to turn into a wolf at the time of the full moon.

The logic behind this troubled me, however. Why the full moon? I had frequently seen the full moon and been exposed to its light and I had felt no effect of any kind as a result. Was moonshine substantially different from sunshine or from artificial light?

For that matter, was the light of a full moon different from the light of a moon one day past the full, or one day before it. I could hardly tell the difference in the moon's shape on those three days. How could a werewolf tell, therefore, and on an all-or-nothing basis, too? Shouldn't such a werewolf turn 95-percent wolf on the day before or after the full moon? In fact, should he not turn half wolf on the night of the half moon?

I could work out no satisfactory answers to such questions and the easiest way out was to decide that werewolves could not be affected by the moon in the manner described. (As I grew older, I began to realize there were much more serious questions raised by this matter of human beings turning into wolves, and concluded that there could be no such things as werewolves.)

This business of attributing strange powers to moonshine continues, however. Every once in a while, for instance, I hear of reports concerning statistical studies that seem to show that drugs have pronouncedly different effects on the human body according to the phases of the moon, that crimes of violence, homicide, and suicide are particularly numerous when the moon is full, and so on and so on. This makes it seem that there may be something to old folk-beliefs concerning the importance of the moon, such as the one that different plants ought to be sowed at particular phases of the moon.

As a science fiction writer, I'm automatically attracted to such suggestions because of the plot-complications to which they give rise, if nothing else, but, as a scientist, I must stop and consider, all the more so since I can't trust myself, in my SF writer aspect, to be objective.

First, I know very well that human beings have been aware of the changing shape of the moon from

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prehistoric times. The first calendars were based on the Lunar cycle, and various religious, mathematical and scientific concepts arose out of that. The moon was so incredibly important to the early thinking of humanity that it is only natural to suppose that all sorts of powers would be attributed to the moon that it may very likely fail to have in actual fact. (Thus, the connection between moon and insanity is considered to be nonsense, but it is, neverthless, enshrined in our word "lunacy.")

It is possible, therefore, that people are so predisposed to believe in moon-effects that in gathering statistics on the matter, they are unconsciously swayed in their data-selection in such a way as to demonstrate what they already tend to believe; i.e. that human behavior varies with the phases of the moon.

And yet suppose that, as more and more statistics are gathered, the results were to become irrefutable; and that it had to be admitted that the phases of the moon had important effects on human behavior. How could that be explained?

One might conclude that moonshine has some powerful effect on human beings for some as-yet-unknown reason. That, however, although an attractive way out to those with a tendency to mysticism, is bad science. One does *not* fall back on the unknown until all possible known effects have been investigated and found wanting.

For instance, one obvious factor that changes with the phases of the

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moon is the quantity of light that falls upon the landscape at night. In the pre-industrial era, people who had to travel by night would prefer, if they could, to travel during the week of the full moon so that there would be as much light as possible (assuming the absence of clouds). For similar reasons when "Astronomy Island" (a group of amateur astronomers) carries through its annual summer expedition to Bermuda to observe the stars, they invariably choose the week of the new moon so that the light of the stars won't be washed out in moonshine.

It is not that kind of behavior (voluntary and logical) we're interested in, however. What about the effect of the moon on reaction to drugs or on psychopathology? Is there anything about the moon's light that is different from that of the sun? After all, moonshine is only reflected sunshine. To be sure, the light from the moon is partly polarized, but so is scattered light from the daytime sky.

One thing the moon *does* affect is the tides. The pull of the moon, exerted with greater intensity on the side of the Earth facing it than on the side opposite, produces two humps of water, and any given spot on Earth turns through these humps at half-day intervals. What's more, the humps of water grow higher or lower as the moon's phases change. The phases change as the position of the moon with respect to the sun changes, and when the sun is pulling in a direction parallel to that of the moon (at full moon or new moon), the humps are highest. When the sun is pulling in a direction of right angles to that of the moon (at either half-moon), the humps are lowest.

It follows then that every half day there is a high-tide/low-tide cycle, and every two weeks a high-high-tide/low-high-tide cycle.

Can these tide cycles affect human beings? At first thought, one doesn't see how, but it is certain that they affect creatures who spend their lives at or near the sea-shore. The ebb and flow of the tide must be intimately involved with the rhythm of their lives. Thus, the time of highest tide may be the appropriate occasion to lay eggs, for instance. The behavior of such creatures therefore seems to be related with the phases of the moon. That is not mysterious if you consider the moon/tide/behavior connection. If, however, you leave out the intermediate step and consider only a moon/behavior connection, you change a rational view into a semi-mystical one.

But what connection can there be between worms and fish living at the edge of the sea, and human beings?

Surely there is an evolutionary connection. We may consider ourselves far removed from tidal creatures *now* but we are descended from organisms that, 400 million years ago, were probably living at the sea-land interface and were intimately affected by tidal rhythms.

Yes, but that was 400 million

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years ago. Can we argue that the tidal rhythms of those days would affect us now? It doesn't seem likely, but it is a conceivable possibility.

After all, we might argue it out thus—

We still have a few bones at the bottom end of our spine that represent all that is left of a tail that our ancestors had at least 20 million years ago. We have an appendix that is the remnant of an organ that hasn't been used for even longer. In the same way whales and pythons have small bones that represent the hind legs their ancestors once had many millions of years ago; the young hoatzin bird has two claws on each wing that date back to the eons before birds developed full-fledged wings; the horse has thin bones that represent all that is left of two side-hooves each leg once had but has no longer. In our own case, we (and other mammals), as embryos, even develop the beginnings of gills that quickly disappear, but that hark back to when our ancestors were sea creatures.

Such vestigial organs are well-known and occur in almost all organisms (and represent extremely strong evidence in favor of biological evolution). Why should there not also be vestigial remnants of ancestral biochemical or psychological properties? In particular, why should we not retain some aspects of the old tidal rhythms?

Our complex minds might still sway rhythmically in the half-day and fourteen-day tidal cycles that affected our ancestors so many millions of years ago. This would be unusual and surprising but, nevertheless, rational and believable. To omit the tidal component of the chain of cause-and-effect, however, and to suppose that our behavior sways with the phases of the moon is likely to send us on a mystical chase after nothing.

How can we demonstrate this tidal rhythm more effectively? Is there anything better than simply continuing to collect data and to correlate behavior with the moon's phases?

It seems to me that if these rhythms affect such things as our response to drugs or our tendency to violence or depression, then the rhythms must affect our internal workings. There must be a fourteen-day rise and fall in hormone production, or hormone balance; or such a rise and fall in the activity of our immune system, or our cerebral drug receptors, or various aspects of our neurochemistry.

Such variations in our biochemistry would be much more persuasive, it seems to me, than the study of effects that are once or twice removed. We would then have more solid reasoning and less moonshine. ●

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LETTERS

Dear Shawna, Isaac, Sheila, and staff,

If immortality rests on cell division, then immortality serums are here already. Such drugs as methotrexate slow down cell division to a crawl. If only the toxic effects could be arrested.

I'm not sure it's worth it, however. Such drugs are very unpleasant to take. Who would want immortality at such a price?

It is true that you gain time as an individual when you take these drugs, since they can prolong life when a serious condition threatens. Today these drugs are being used for everything else, then why not immortality? If only a limited number of cell divisions are allowed, they seem to fill the bill.

Somehow I don't regard the thought of a four-billion-year-old strain of DNA directing my life as a very attractive idea. Just think, this ancient strain of DNA is guiding my fingers as I write this, probably seeking immortality.

E. Douglas Cline

Are you sure you want to slow down or stop cell division? You'll stop growing hair, you'll stop growing new skin, you'll stop healing wounds, and you'll stop regenerating various organs.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Doctor A. and Ms. McCarthy,

I just read a letter from Andrew Poulos in your September issue and feel compelled to respond before finishing the rest of the magazine.

Mr. Poulos bemoans form rejections and the impersonality of the editor/beginning writer relationship. As someone who's in the trenches with him, fighting to get published, I can sympathize. Yet the thought of actually *complaining* about the way things have to be has never entered my mind.

I've been writing seriously (meaning submitting my scripts) for about five months now. In those five months, I've sold one story to a men's magazine and one story to *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*. Two stories out of some fifteen or twenty, nine of which are still making their editorial rounds.

For the first couple of months, my stories came back with shocking speed, accompanied by form rejections. If I believed in the story, I sent it out to another market the next day. Some of those early stories are still out there, still bouncing from place to place.

Then I started getting little notes, usually one-liners, typed at the bottom of the form rejection. If the notes made sense, I took another look at the story in question. Some

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I revised. Some I sent out again, as-is. And some ended up in the dead file. I made a sale. It wasn't the *Atlantic*, but it was a sale. And then I made another.

I get lots of one-line notes on the bottom of my form rejections these days. But whether I'm getting "personal" attention from an editor or not, I continue to send out my stories. I've edited various publications and I know how difficult an editor's job is, how depressing it is to read the tenth unreadable manuscript of the day.

An editor needs new writers. They're the lifeblood that keeps their publications functioning. If they feel you're showing promise, they'll let you know. And until they let you know, you've got to keep plugging away, sending out the stories you believe in, realizing that a form rejection means nothing more than the sad fact that they just don't have time to respond personally.

I haven't broken into *IAsfm* yet, but I will. I know that for a fact. And to do that, I'm going to have to keep submitting, "personal" touch or not.

Regards,

Ken White
Tequesta, FL

Very reasonable and sensible. Which reminds me—in the last couple of months I received two rejections! The reason given in both cases was "not quite." Tough! I'll try again.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Isaac, Shawna, et al.,

I'm not sure who Et Al is but I don't want to leave anyone out. Lately I have noticed that like your stories, some of your letters almost sing. I also notice that it is as hard, if not harder, to get a letter printed as a story. For a long while I have pondered over this and had about decided to write for your Guidelines for Letters, when you maybe handled the problem.

I now know you want letters you can answer! In addition, I have noticed lately if one is of the female persuasion, which I am not, there seems to be a slightly better chance to be included. Or maybe girls ask more questions.

Jim Weddington
Tustin, CA

P.S. If you think that is too wordy, how about this: How does one get published in your Letters section?

By interesting or amusing me.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. & Shawna

I was prompted to write in defense of editors and publishers to Andrew Poulos' letter complaining about non-personalized rejection letters.

He, like many people in many skilled occupations, feels one learns by experience which cannot be accessed without prior experience; a Catch-22 situation. He also, like others, doesn't attempt to take control of his destiny but instead blames you for his troubles.

Mr. Poulos mentions "Yes, I have read several 'How To' books." In my opinion that's not a serious effort to learn writing skills. Many expert science fiction writers teach

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courses in writing. I know Kurt Vonnegut has taught at Columbia, for example.

Taking a professional-level course avails the students the opportunity for personal critiques of their stories. It takes work and it takes time to develop these skills.

No one should expect you to provide a mail-order correspondence course in writing when sending out rejection letters. You work hard, as is evidenced by the excellent quality of your magazine. Please don't divert any of your efforts away from that job.

Sincerely,

David Fitzpatrick
Stockton, NJ

Even writing courses may not prove enough. One has to practice writing and it may take dozens of stories and much time to make progress. How long does it take to learn to play the violin at a professional level? It is no less difficult to learn to play the typewriter at a professional level.

—Isaac Asimov

Another option for struggling writers is attendance at one of the many SF writing workshops put on by fan and professional groups across the country. Many regional cons, for instance, are sponsoring workshops these days.

—Shawna McCarthy

Dear Editor:

I thoroughly enjoyed Dr. Asimov's spritely quest for a suitable (i.e., meaningful and workable) definition of an "editorial" in the September 1984 *IAsfm*. If I may be so bold, I'd like to suggest a subject for one of Dr. Asimov's future editorials (I don't have all the back issues of *IAsfm*, so the subject may have already been covered): I (and many other aspiring science fiction/fantasy writers, I am sure) would like to see an editorial devoted to what you, the editor, and Dr. Asimov specifically want in the way of fiction and non-fiction—word lengths, specific types of stories, manuscript format, cover letters (or no cover letters), etc. For example, I have had editors tell me, *No corrasable bond paper!* (Now I know.); *Put your last name/ID title page number in the upper right hand corner* (I had been putting only my last name and page number there—now I *know*); and a dozen other things of that nature. I, as a hopeful writer, want to know as much about what you want in the way of science fiction/fact—and the mechanics of how you want it (format) presented to you. Many rejections could possibly be turned into acceptances if writers knew exactly what the editor wants and exactly how the editor wants it submitted. For an aspiring freelance writer any help on the way up is *greatly* appreciated!

Sincerely,

Bobby G. Warner
5 Melrose Drive
Wedgefield, SC 29168

We do send out exactly these instructions, known as writer's guidelines, on request, if you send us a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

—Isaac Asimov

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Dear Sirs:

I have just finished (yeah, I know—I'm slow) reading Prebehalla and Moran's "Realtime" in the August '84 issue of *IAsfm*. I just thought it was the nicest story you have published in a long time. Don't get me wrong; you guys do a great job selecting material, but this one was special. Ms. Prebehalla's admitted romantic sentiments and love of books shone through the story in every paragraph. If she is Maggie Archer, I am in love with both of her.

I think when someone does a good job they should be told. Your selection of the story showed real taste and sensitivity. The skill of the authors in creating a wonderful, intelligent, and charming adventure is to be applauded. I read the story to my children and it now appears to be one of their favorites. Cheers for all of you.

Earl L. Augusta
Huntington, CT

Yes, I think writers who hit the bull's eye should be told. It is perhaps only human to be more articulate about something that displeases you than about something that pleases you, but I'm a writer myself and I know that I wait impatiently for the bouquets and don't mind waiting—even forever—for the brickbats.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

In the August issue's letters section you replied to a reader about his problem with too many books and magazines in his home. You told him to "Throw out everything else. (Except my books, if you have any.)"

I agree he should keep your books at the top of the priority list but please don't encourage people to throw away books and magazines. There are many uses for old books and magazines. Libraries, hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and charities often have need of reading material to provide to those without. There are also used-book stores and garage sales for those who want some return on their investment.

I especially believe that SF books should be offered to younger readers to stimulate an interest in reading. Often friends will be glad to take or store your library of books if you allow them access to read some. Books, like a mind, are a terrible thing to waste.

I am a charter subscriber to *Asimov's* and have kept every issue; however, I do not keep paperbacks after I have read them. I trade in paperbacks at used-book stores and sometimes donate hardbacks to the local library. I try to share my SF library with others and encourage others to be generous with theirs. The value of books comes from reading and the more readers a book has the better.

I'm sure there will be other letters about this and I hope that you will publish one of them since your "throw it out" response may influence some readers.

Sincerely,

Edward Glaze III
Port Mansfield, TX

Oh, my! I must explain that there is a form of humor called "hyper-

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bole," which consists of deliberate exaggeration for the sake of a laugh. Come, you don't think I would suggest really *throwing out books. Even an Arthur Clarke book should be kept. You might want the short leg of a table propped up. (There is also a form of humor which consists of making a ridiculous suggestion with a straight face, so don't object. Just laugh.)*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Editorial Staff of *IAsfm*,

I think it's about time that those of us who have just been sitting around quietly reading the magazine and approving of it should stand up and give all of you a rousing cheer and loud applause.

I just finished reading the December 1984 issue and I'd like you to chalk me up on the side of those readers who don't mind seeing you print a story once in a while that's not quite what we expect. I find some of the stories people complain about quite interesting, even if they aren't hard science fiction.

I didn't even mind the crossword puzzle, although I must admit to a bit of prejudice in that respect. I'm a fellow puzzle constructor of Merle's for *Dell*.

I agree with Charles Platt that my real preference in stories is that I be surprised at the writer's imagination. I'm very easily bored and I like to see the new twists some authors can think up.

So, keep up the good work and don't let those readers whose main goal in life seems to be to find fault have any effect on what stories you choose to print.

Jerri Lynn Burket

We are always ready to receive cheers and applause. Thank you. But, you know, we listen to the readers who find fault. It is not at all impossible that in certain cases they may be right and we may be wrong.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Ms. McCarthy:

I started subscribing to *IAsfm* about three or four years ago, and I almost dropped it off my subscription list during its "juvenile" period. Now I'm overjoyed that I didn't, because I'd have missed "The Postman" by David Brin; "PRESS ENTER■" by John Varley, and most important of all, the Viewpoint article "Don't Worry, It's Only Science Fiction" by H. Bruce Franklin in the Mid-Dec.'84 issue.

Although the Franklin article was published too late to have any effect on the current election, I would like to send photocopies of the article to a number of nationally prominent politicians. Owing to the relatively limited circulation of *IAsfm*, I feel that this method of bringing such material to the attention of our elected representatives might be the most effective way to bring such articles into the light. Also, copies of this article could be sent to local newspaper, television, and radio stations.

If you would give permission to your readers to copy this article and send copies to these people, *and if every reader of* IAsfm *sent a copy of the article to her or his senator, representative, and local media,* then the sheer volume of letters would be a major event in this country's political history.

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Sincerely yours,

Josef D. Prall
Carrolton, TX

To the Readers of IAsfm:

I am indeed gratified by all the positive responses to my Viewpoint "Don't Worry, It's Only Science Fiction," and am especially delighted to learn of the requests to copy and use the article. So I hereby give my permission to all readers to copy or reprint the article, to distribute it at school, church, or wherever, and to send it to individuals or organizations, so long as such copies or reprints are not offered for sale or included in any publication offered for sale.

I hope it does some good. Perhaps the militarization of space can remain just a form of science fiction while our actual future realizes science fiction's grand vision of a united human species with a sense of our role in the cosmos.

H. Bruce Franklin
Professor of English
Rutgers—The State University
Newark, NJ 07102

Addendum. This summer I will be running my 13th annual seminar at the Rensselaer Institute in Rensselaerville, New York, 12147. It will run from August 3 to 7 inclusive and the subject this year will be on biotechnology. "Man-made Evolution?" is the title. If you're curious, call Mary Ann Ronconi at 518-797-3783.

—Isaac Asimov

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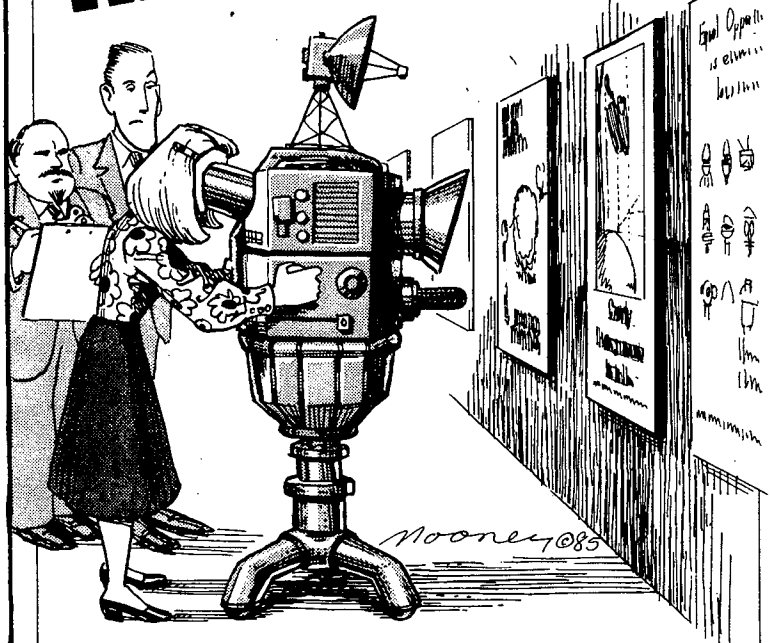

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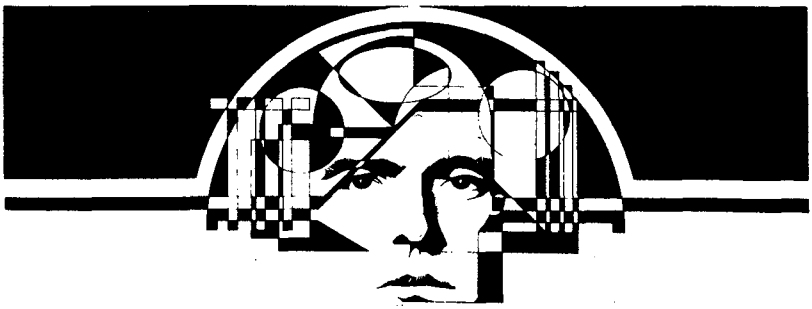
MARTIN GARDNER

CATCH THE BEM



On the planet Evenod the most popular household pet is a small BEM (bug-eyed monster) with a personality somewhat like that of an earth dog, though less docile. You see on the opposite page the streets of a town on Evenod. An Evenoder, at the street intersection indicated by the letter *E*, is trying to catch his runaway pet BEM at an intersection southeast of him.

Put a penny on spot *E* and a dime on the BEM spot. You now have an amusing game to play with a friend. Here are the simple rules:

1. Players alternate turns, one moving the penny, the other moving the dime. The Evenoder (penny) always goes first.
2. Each move is one block in any direction.
3. The Evenoder catches the BEM by moving his penny on top of the dime.
4. The Evenoder wins if he catches the BEM in 50 or fewer of his own moves. The BEM wins if he is not caught by this time.

After playing the game for a while you will discover that the BEM is not easy to catch. It seems impossible to trap the beast in a corner. However, there is a secret strategy that enables the Evenoder to trap his pet quickly. The strategy will introduce you to the concept of parity, one of the most valuable tools in combinatorial mathematics.

If you can't discover the secret strategy, you'll find it explained on page 98.

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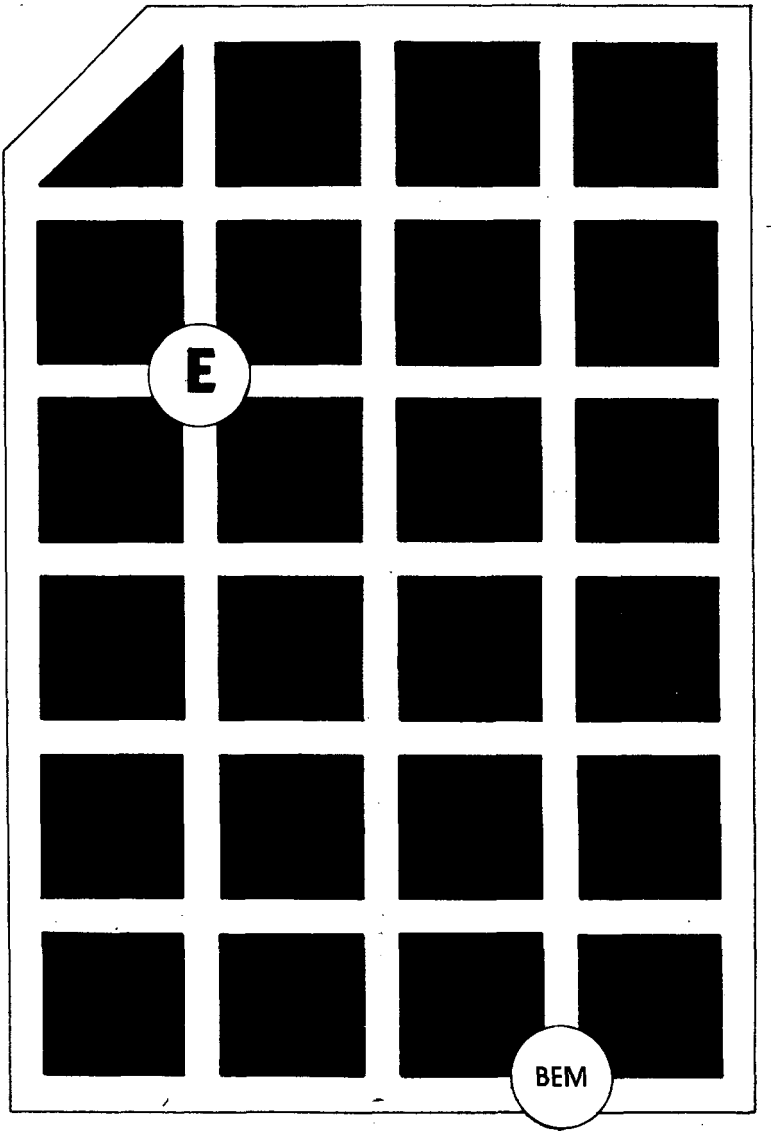

CATCH-THE-BEM GAME

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GAMING

by Dana Lombardy

If role-playing has a certain appeal to you, but you and your friends prefer traditional board games, then the game *Talisman* may provide the answer of a design that bridges the gap between the two different types of games ($16 at your local store, or direct from Games Workshop U.S., 9110F Red Branch Road, Columbia, MD 21045).

Talisman is a board game of magical quest played in a mythical world of dragons and sorcery. You choose one of fourteen different characters to move around the board, such as a warrior, a wizard, a thief, a troll, a ghoul, etc. Each of these characters has a unique power which becomes important when you encounter other characters during play.

The object of the game is to find the magic talisman, use its power to enter the Valley of Fire (in the center of the board), and seize the Crown of Command. With the Crown in your possession, you can cast magical Command Spells to force the other players out of the game—leaving you the sole character remaining on the board and thereby the victor.

Talisman comes with a full-color, 16- by 22-inch mounted game board; an 8-page rules folder; fourteen Character Cards (describing special abilities of each character); fourteen cardboard character "pawns" with plastic bases to move around on the board; 104 illustrated Adventure Cards detailing monsters, treasures, and other items that you may encounter; 24 illustrated Spell Cards describing the magical spells you may cast; 28 illustrated Purchase Cards detailing items you may buy; 4 illustrated Talisman Cards (magical objects); 4 Toad Cards (to use to turn another player into one!); 4 Alignment Cards (to determine if you are a good or evil character); 140 die-cut counters representing gold (treasure) and the levels of strength, etc., of your character; and one six-sided die.

Not only is there a lot in this game, it's beautifully presented. The artwork on the game board and various cards, much in full-color, is well done and adds a lot to the enjoyment of the game.

The game board depicts three different realms: an outer region of villages and woods; a middle area of warlocks and temples; and a deadly inner region that you must eventually enter to take the Crown of Command and win the game.

The game is played by moving your character around the board, attempting to find a safe (or the least dangerous) route to the middle region. Most of the time you move your character by the roll of the die, but sometimes a Spell Card or an encounter with a strange being can move you suddenly to another square.

When you enter a square, the in-

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structions on that square may tell you to draw an Adventure Card, or roll the die to determine the action for or against you in that square. For example, if you are a "good" character and land on the Chapel square, you may gain extra "lives" (similar to the nine lives of a cat) by rolling the die. This is very good, since it's possible for your character to "die" many times in the quest for a talisman and the route to the center of the board.

Most of the time, however, the instructions on a square have you draw an Adventure Card. Most of these cards are monsters that you must defeat (or avoid) to stay in the game. Some characters can "charm" beasts, while other characters must use magic or strength and weapons to overcome monsters and unfriendly animals.

By defeating monsters, gathering treasure and magic items found, and accumulating "lives" to expend if necessary, your character gradually becomes strong enough to attempt to "jump" to the middle region of squares. The squares in the middle region are much tougher than those in the outer region—more chances to lose a life, lose treasure, or lose magic items you've accumulated.

When you're in the middle region, the goal is to go through the Portal of Power and enter the Plain of Peril in the center of the board. As soon as your character is in the center region, you must move rapidly to the Valley of Fire in order to reach the Crown of Command. This may sound easy, but every square is dangerous and a seemingly certain victory can suddenly be turned into elimination from the game.

A typical game of *Talisman* can take from one to two hours to play, and the last moves—as players rush for the center region and the Crown of Command—can be quite tense. Although there's a lot of dice rolling, strategy and planning do make a big difference in the success of your character's quest.

The key to victory is to build your character's strength as rapidly as possible by accumulating "lives," treasure, magic items, and followers (allies that can be expended instead of your character's life). Then, with this strength, you move into the middle region. You don't want to stay long in the middle area—just long enough to get to the Portal of Power in order to enter the center region. You'll lose a few "lives" and other items en route to the Portal, but with a little luck, you won't lose too much to make the trip to the center region a foolhardy quest. The only reason to be in the center area is to get to the Valley of Fire *quickly* and seize the Crown of Command. If you stay too long in the center region, your character will surely be eliminated from the game.

The play of the game is fast-paced. You always have something to do every time you move your character: fight or escape a monster, avoid a trap, gather up treasure or magic items, accumulate "lives" through magical spells, etc.

Talisman may be a board game, but it captures the "feel" and excitement of fantasy role-playing very well. It's highly recommended. ●

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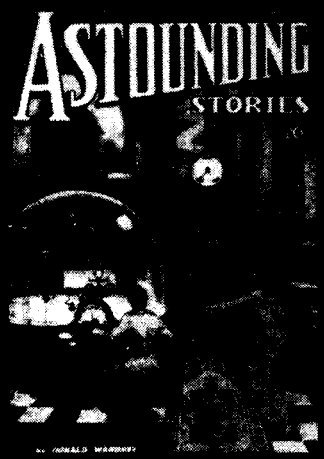

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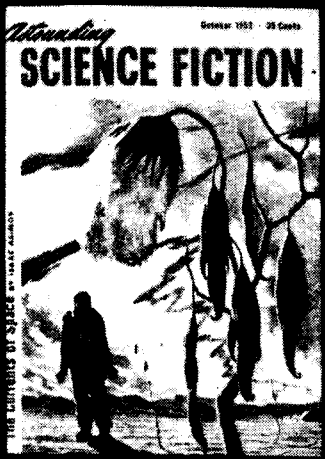

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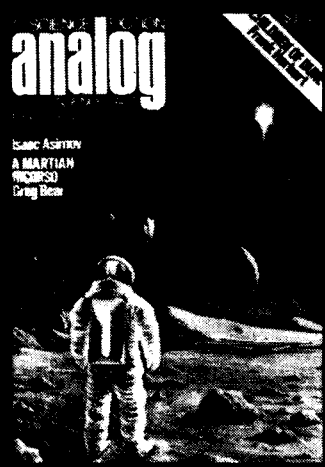

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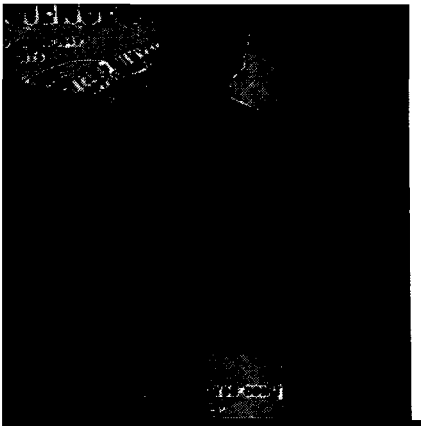

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VIEWPOINT

THE LITTLE TIN GOD OF CHARACTERIZATION

art: Arthur George

by Isaac Asimov

Characterization is often considered of prime importance to a well-crafted literary effort. In the following Viewpoint, however, Dr. Asimov argues that there is another aspect of literature which is even more important to the successful science fiction story.

As I grow older and as my position hardens in the pantheon of science fiction, I become a tempting target for Young Turks, for those new experimentalists in the field of science fiction who see themselves as the bold visionaries of the future.

I can see their point. I have been around for a long time and I haven't changed much as far as my style and philosophy of writing is concerned. I have my weaknesses and I haven't struggled to correct them and despite those weaknesses and despite the fact that (by Young Turk calculations) I am increasingly out of touch with the changing times, I continue to be successful. That *is* irritating.

But I wonder why that should

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VIEWPOINT

"It's a matter of emphasis, I suppose. I cannot speak for other genres, or for literature generally, but in science fiction, the ideas are of prime importance and (in my opinion) should not be sacrificed to the welfare of any other aspect of the story."

be. There ought to be some reason for my continuing success. It certainly can't be my incredible good looks and the well-known geniality of my magnetic personality.

To begin with, let's see what they complain about. In a recent issue of a science fiction magazine (not this one), one fiery young literary radical is reported as saying (and I can hear the contempt in his voice), "When you read someone like Asimov, the characters are just interchangeable."

Yes, I've heard that before. I'm deficient in characterization.

So what! I make no special effort to create Dickensian types. I have no enormous interest in having my characters live in human consciousness as though they were so many Prince Hamlets and Huck Finns. My attention is riveted elsewhere and sometimes I do get tired of being harried and chivvied over the fact that I'm not doing something I'm not trying to do and don't particularly want to do.

Does that sound surprising? Is it possible not to attach importance to characterization? To *characterization*? Surely the

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purpose of literature is to create believable people and through them to illuminate the human condition.

I dare say! And those writers who are anxious to do just that have my permission to do so.

I, however, am anxious to illuminate the human condition in a different way—not through characters, but through ideas. You've heard it said, perhaps, that "Science fiction is a literature of ideas"? Well, I believe it.

In a way, all literature has, or should have, a content of ideas, just as all literature has, or should have, characters.

It's a matter of emphasis, I suppose. I cannot speak for other genres, or for literature generally, but in science fiction, the ideas are of prime importance and (in my opinion) should not be sacrificed to the welfare of any other aspect of the story.

Why in science fiction, particularly? Because science fiction differs from all other branches of literature in having the events played against a society that is significantly different from our own and yet that is plausible and internally consistent. In most literature, the social background of the story *is* our own, or, if it is placed in a distant and exotic locale, it would become our own if we were to move to that locale.

If the story is a piece of historical fiction and is therefore set in the past, then the social background is that of *our* known past, or the known past of some other section of the world, and is recognizable as such. If the story is a fantasy, then the social background may have nothing to do with any real society, past or present, but the invented society need not be plausible and it need not even be internally consistent.

To invent a society that is not ours and yet that *is* plausible and *is* internally consistent is, in itself, a very difficult thing to do well, as anyone knows who has tried it. To produce that background and, at the same time, to invent an interesting story that can be played against it is even more difficult.

To devise an effective interplay between the two, background and story, is most difficult of all. The social background must be carefully described, for (ideally) it should be as interesting as the

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story itself is, but that description must not be allowed to get in the way of the story. Similarly, the story must be told briskly but it must not be allowed to obscure the details of the society. To do all that makes good science fiction the hardest writing there is in the world.

My credentials as expert in making that judgment are probably better than almost anyone's in the world. I have written several types of fiction and many types of non-fiction in all lengths and for all sorts of audiences from laymen to experts and from children to educated adults, so when I tell you that nothing is harder to write than good science fiction you are getting that from someone who knows. Nor do I come to that conclusion simply because, through some stroke of bad luck, I just happen to be inproficient at writing good science fiction. I know better than that, and so do you.

Well, then, if someone is going to take the trouble to write science fiction, why should he feel he must bow down to the little tin god of characterization? If he is so anxious to create characters, why not write something that is a lot easier to write than science fiction is, so that he can concentrate all the more effectively on characterization?

No, I'm not saying that, as a matter of principle, you should forget all about characterization if you are writing science fiction. If you can stick some in and make your characters interesting and even unforgettable, great. Why not? But that is not what you should be *concentrating* on. That is not the thing to which you must sacrifice everything else.

You must instead ask yourself this: Having chosen to write something that is particularly difficult to write, what can I do with it that I can't do with any other type of literature?

Only locating that unique something will suffice to compensate you for your folly in plunging into the morass of science fiction.

And the one thing that science fiction offers the writer, the one thing that no other branch of literature will offer, is its use as a unique vehicle for presenting ideas.

We all know, through

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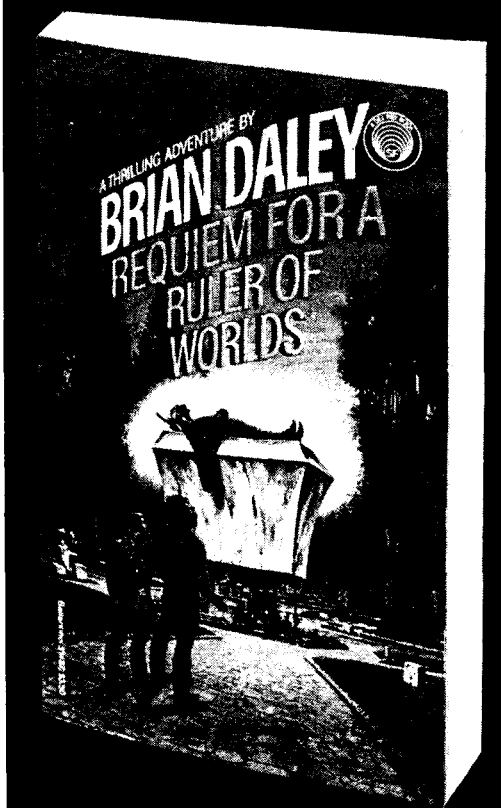

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VIEWPOINT

experience, how people are likely to react to particular stimuli within our society. Most of us even know how people of existing societies other than our own are likely to react.

But how would people react to particular situations in societies that we know nothing about because they have never existed?

You might think: Who cares?

Yet suppose these societies carry weight with us because we are made to believe they might exist some day? And suppose they have an acceptable texture because they are made internally consistent? And suppose we are made to see that these human reactions to unfamiliar stimuli under unfamiliar conditions somehow bring a fresh illumination to matters of interest in our own society? Would it not then seem to you that a science fiction story was justifying its existence, even though it might be deficient in characterization and in some of the other qualities you have been taught were important in ordinary literature?

But let's consider some examples.

The first science fiction magazine to appear was *Amazing Stories* with its April, 1926 issue. For a little over two years, that magazine filled its pages mostly with reprints of the already published works of various science fiction writers of the past, notably H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, and Edgar Allan Poe.

The first successful *contemporary* American writer with an important *original* science fiction story in an s.f. magazine was Edward Elmer Smith. His first story was a three-part serial entitled "The Skylark of Space," which started in the August, 1928, *Amazing*.

The instant that first part appeared, the readers of the magazine exploded with joy. At a single bound, E. E. Smith became the beloved "Doc" Smith of the fans (he had a Ph.D.) and the most highly regarded science fiction writer in the magazine field, a post he continued to hold for five years. I began to read science fiction just six months after the serial was concluded, but all I read in the letter columns was "The Skylark of Space"—"The Skylark of Space"—

Well, read "The Skylark of

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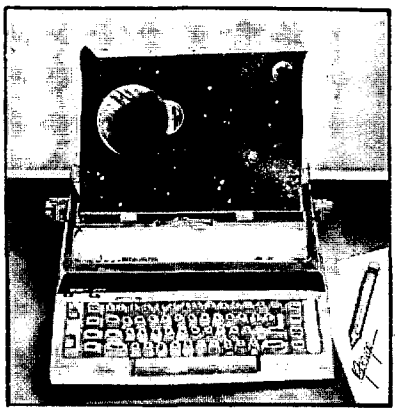
Space" and judge for yourself as to its qualities. The characterization is rudimentary (though there is an interesting villain), the style is clumsy, the dialogue stilted, the love interest, what there is of it, is so childish it is embarrassing (though Doc improved with time to be sure)—and yet "The Skylark of Space" was, and deserved to be, a classic.

Why? —Because it had an important idea.

It was the first science fiction story that dealt with *interstellar* travel; with flights between the stars, rather than among the planets of our own solar system. That was important in itself, but it was not all. "The Skylark of Space" was a picture of human beings facing the entire starry universe and being unafraid of it. Until then, writers who wished to describe the universe (whether in fact or in fiction) inevitably drew a picture of insignificant humanity on its dust-mote world grovelling in fearful incomprehension of the enormous vastness. Smith, instead, had human beings striding from world to world in growing confidence, calmly mastering the



"If someone is going to take the trouble to write science fiction, why should he feel he must bow down to the little tin god of characterization? If he is so anxious to create characters, why not write something that is a lot easier to write than science fiction is, so that he can concentrate all the more effectively on characterization?"

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VIEWPOINT

universe and proving themselves superior to it. The readers, faced with something entirely new, loved it.

Did Smith intend to excite his readers with this remarkable vision? I don't know. I never thought to ask him. But he himself had the vision, he himself was excited by it, and it was to revel in that excitement that he wrote the story. That vision and that excitement could go only into a science fiction story. It did not matter that he lacked the skill, or the inclination, perhaps, to put anything else into the story. The vision was enough.

Smith's importance to science fiction was clearly demonstrated by the fact that he quickly attracted imitators, the most important of whom was John W. Campbell, Jr. All that could be done by either Smith, or by his imitators, however, was to make things bigger at each go-round. It was difficult to find new ideas and the "super-science story" gradually became outmoded.

But then came the July, 1934, issue of *Wonder Stories* which, at that time, was the moribund third of the three science fiction magazines that existed. In it there appeared "A Martian Odyssey" by Stanley G. Weinbaum, and with that story *he* at once succeeded to the post of the "best science fiction writer" of the magazine world.

There was nothing super-science about "A Martian Odyssey." As the title suggests, the story simply describes a trip across the Martian terrain by a member of an exploring party there. It has *one* memorable character and that was Tweel, an ostrich-like Martian, who was undoubtedly intelligent, but whose behavior and thought processes were utterly alien.

Tweel helped make the story a classic, but, again, what was important was an idea. Until then there had been monsters enough in science fiction, but there was nothing about them but hugeness. There were giant reptiles, giant ants, giant amoebas. There was no suggestion of fitness to an environment; they merely existed in a vacuum in order to threaten the heroes of the story.

Weinbaum, on the other hand, not only described Martian life-forms but fit them into their

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world. He talked about how they lived. He was the first to give thought not to alien life by itself but to an alien ecology. Again, the readers were exalted by the new vision and at once elevated story and author to the heights. Admittedly, it was better written than most science fiction stories of the time, but not enough so to matter. It was the idea that counted.

Again, there was a virtual explosion of imitators, of whom the most important were Arthur K. Barnes and Henry Kuttner. Weinbaum himself died, tragically, of cancer, only a year and a half after he had burst on the scene, and the alien ecology stories gradually trailed off as the idea ran its course.

Meanwhile, John W. Campbell, Jr., was abandoning the super-science story and beginning to write a whole series of stories under the pseudonym of Don A. Stuart; stories which were essentially low-key, but which always had some novel idea that readers were not expecting. The first of these was "Twilight" in the November, 1934, *Astounding*, which depicted the earth of the far future in which the machines were perfect but humanity had degenerated. Then, in the June, 1937, *Astounding*, he reversed that and in "Forgetfulness" pictured the earth in which the machines were perfect but humanity had progressed far beyond them and needed them no longer.

When he became editor of *Astounding* in 1938, Campbell decided to make the idea the thing. Stories, he decided, were to have verisimilitude. Engineers would act like engineers, scientists like scientists, people like people. What would make the science fiction story would be not the style, not colossality, but problems and solutions of the future—solutions that arose out of an idea.

He gathered writers from among the eager young readers who came to visit him, and from among those who sent in manuscripts; and those who showed any promise at all, he challenged with ideas. The first "Campbell writer" who became a first magnitude star at once was A. E. van Vogt, whose first story, "Black Destroyer," appearing in July, 1939, dealt with a

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"monster" who wasn't just a huge mass of beef, but who was a menace that was intelligent enough to test the human protagonists to the full. The idea of a *worthy* menace was delightful.

Then in the very next issue, that of August, 1939, appeared "Lifeline," the first story of Robert A. Heinlein. He presented the idea of down-to-earth "fortune-telling"; the picture of each human being as a long four-dimensional pink worm, with probes running along the time axis to tell what was happening. It was fascinating and against-one's-will convincing.

A. E. van Vogt gradually faded, but Heinlein did not. He at once succeeded to the post of "best science fiction writer," and imitators began at once to follow in his footsteps. I, myself, had no hesitation in trying to study his technique and follow it.

To many, Heinlein is still "the best" four and a half decades later. He was the first writer to be selected for the "Grand Master" award by the Science Fiction Writers of America.

And me? What about me?

I, too, was a Campbell writer. My first story in *Astounding* appeared in the July, 1939, issue, right along with "Black Destroyer." It was "Trends" and Campbell accepted it not because of its style or characterization (it was badly deficient in both) but because it had an unusual idea that interested him. It was the idea of social resistance to the very concept of space flight (something which eventually actually came to pass). He had never seen it before and it was not even something he had suggested to me. He took the story on the strength of that and it was enough to make him decide not to let go of me.

I, however, did not spring to the moon in a single leap. I wrote and published for a little over two years without much notice being taken of me. Then in the September, 1941, *Astounding*, there appeared "Nightfall," and suddenly I began to rise in the ranks. And what it did have was an idea, one which, I have always admitted, Campbell gave me. (However, to use a football metaphor, all he did was hand me the ball; I had to run with it, and score the touchdown.)

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VIEWPOINT

The idea was simply the reverse of Doc Smith's. The stars, which all through human history, had seemed beautiful and benevolent to humanity and which had symbolized all that was good and heavenly (think of the Star of Bethlehem) were suddenly revealed as dangerous and deadly; the mere sight was enough to drive intelligent beings insane. (And, indeed, twenty years after the story first appeared, astronomers began to discover that the universe and its starry host were indeed far more dangerous than had ever been dreamed of.)

For over forty years that story, written only moderately well, has continued to seize the imagination of new readers. It holds the same spell over kids today, even though their fathers weren't yet born when I wrote it. —Because of the idea.

At about the same time I had three more ideas of first-class importance, each one of which I exploited to the full. They were 1) the all-human galaxy, 2) psychohistory, and (most important) 3) the Three Laws of Robotics.

It was these ideas and the popularity of the stories that contained them (my "robot series" and my "Foundation series"), and not any superlative writing skills I had, that finally made me one of the Big Three along with Robert Heinlein and Arthur Clarke and kept me there for forty years. I have had other ideas since, of course, notably in my stories "The Last Question" and "The Ugly Little Boy," but the fact is that for the most part I have been ceaselessly mining the mother-lodes I had uncovered by the time I was 22 years old.

Yes, science fiction is a literature of ideas. It is because I realized this early on (thanks to Campbell—everything is thanks to Campbell) and never let myself forget it, that I became successful and continued to be successful no matter how the field changed about me.

But wait! Surely you can have terrific characterization and a wonderfully poetic style along with the idea. These things, after all, are not mutually exclusive.

Yes, indeed. There's no reason you can't have it all. And if you've got a story with a great idea, that is also well-written, and has unforgettable characters,

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please send it right to this magazine *now*, and the beauteous Shawna will not only see to it that you are sent a handsome check but she will stand ready to kiss you on your forehead.

Even I have managed to write some emotionally effective prose, and to create some decently defined characters. (I'm thinking of "The Ugly Little Boy" and "The Bicentennial Man" and, especially, the middle part of my novel *The Gods Themselves*.)

I do it when I can, but I've got my limits, and if I have to settle for less than 100 percent, I just make sure I remember where the science fictional bottom line is. Not characterization, not style, not poetic metaphor—but idea.

Anything else, I will skimp on if I have to. Not idea. ●

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Bruce Sterling is a freelance writer,
the author of *Schismatrix*. He lives in Austin, Texas,
and writes with the stereo on.
He sometimes removes his mirrorshades
to read odd scraps of history.
Mr. Sterling has had short fiction in *Omni* and *F&SF*,
but this is his first appearance in *IAsfm*.

art: J.K. Potter

DINNER IN AUDOGHAST

by Bruce Sterling

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"Then one arrives at Audoghast, a large and very populous city built in a sandy plain. . . . The inhabitants live in ease and possess great riches. The market is always crowded; the mob is so huge and the chattering so loud that you can scarcely hear your own words. . . . The city contains beautiful buildings and very elegant homes." DESCRIPTION OF NORTHERN AFRICA, Abu Ubayd al-Bakri (1040 - 1094 A.D.)

Delightful Audoghast! Renowned through the civilized world, from Cordova to Baghdad, the city spread in splendor beneath a twilit Saharan sky. The setting sun threw pink and amber across adobe domes, masonry mansions, tall, mud-brick mosques, and open plazas thick with bristling date-palms. The melodious calls of market vendors mixed with the remote and amiable chuckling of Saharan hyenas.

Four gentlemen sat on carpets in a tiled and whitewashed portico, sipping coffee in the evening breeze. The host was the genial and accomplished slave-dealer, Manimenesh. His three guests were Ibn Watunan, the caravan master; Khayali, the poet and musician; and Bagayoko, a physician and court assassin.

The home of Manimenesh stood upon the hillside in the aristocratic quarter, where it gazed down on an open marketplace and the mud-brick homes of the lowly. The prevailing breeze swept away the city reek, and brought from within the mansion the palate-sharpening aromas of lamb in tarragon and roast partridge in lemons and eggplant. The four men lounged comfortably around a low inlaid table, sipping spiced coffee from Chinese cups, and watching the ebb and flow of market life.

The scene below them encouraged a lofty philosophical detachment. Manimenesh, who owned no less than fifteen books, was a well-known patron of learning. Jewels gleamed on his dark, plump hands, which lay cozily folded over his paunch. He wore a long tunic of crushed red velvet, and a gold-threaded skullcap.

Khayali, the young poet, had studied architecture and verse in the schools of Timbuktu. He lived in the household of Manimenesh as his poet and praisemaker, and his sonnets, ghazals, and odes were recited throughout the city. He propped one elbow against the full belly of his two-string *guimbri* guitar, of inlaid ebony, strung with leopard gut.

Ibn Watunan had an eagle's hooded gaze and hands calloused by camel-reins. He wore an indigo turban and a long striped djellaba. In thirty years as a sailor and caravaneer, he had bought and sold Zanzibar ivory, Sumatran pepper, Ferghana silk, and Cordovan leather. Now a taste for refined gold had brought him to Audoghast, for Audoghast's African bullion was known throughout Islam as the standard of quality.

Doctor Bagayoko's ebony skin was ridged with an initiate's scars, and his long, clay-smeared hair was festooned with knobs of chiselled bone.

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He wore a tunic of white Egyptian cotton, hung with gris-gris necklaces, and his baggy sleeves bulged with herbs and charms. He was a native Audoghastian of the animist persuasion, the personal physician of the city's Prince.

Bagayoko's skill with powders, potions, and unguents made him an intimate of Death. He often undertook diplomatic missions to the neighboring Empire of Ghana. During his last visit there, the anti-Audoghast faction had conveniently suffered a lethal outbreak of pox.

Between the four men was the air of camaraderie common to gentlemen and scholars.

They finished the coffee and a slave took the empty pot away. A second slave, a girl from the kitchen staff, arrived with a wicker tray loaded with olives, goat-cheese, and hard-boiled eggs sprinkled with vermilion. At that moment, a muezzin yodelled the evening call to prayer.

"Ah," said Ibn Watunan, hesitating. "Just as we were getting started."

"Never mind," said Manimenesh, helping himself to a handful of olives. "We'll pray twice next time."

"Why was there was no noon prayer today?" said Watunan.

"Our muezzin forgot," the poet said.

Watunan lifted his shaggy brows. "That seems rather lax."

Doctor Bagayoko said, "This is a new muezzin. The last was more punctual, but, well, he fell ill." Bagayoko smiled urbanely and nibbled his cheese.

"We Audoghastians like our new muezzin better," said the poet, Khayali. "He's one of our own, not like that other fellow, who was from Fez. *Our* muezzin is sleeping with a Christian's wife. It's very entertaining."

"You have Christians here?" Watunan said.

"A clan of Ethiopian Copts," said Manimenesh. "And a couple of Nestorians."

"Oh," said Watunan, relaxing. "For a moment I thought you meant real *feringhee* Christians, from Europe."

"From where?" Manimenesh was puzzled.

"Very far away," said Ibn Watunan, smiling. "Ugly little countries, with no profit."

"There were empires in Europe once," said Khayali knowledgeably. "The Empire of Rome was almost as big as the modern civilized world."

Watunan nodded. "I have seen the New Rome, called Byzantium. They have armored horsemen, like your neighbors in Ghana. Savage fighters."

Bagayoko nodded, salting an egg. "Christians eat children."

Watunan smiled. "I can assure you that the Byzantines do no such thing."

"Really?" said Bagayoko. "Well, our Christians do."

"That's just the doctor's little joke," said Manimenesh. "Sometimes

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strange rumors spread about us, because we raid our slaves from the Nyam-Nyam cannibal tribes on the coast. But we watch their diet closely, I assure you."

Watunan smiled uncomfortably. "There is always something new out of Africa. One hears the oddest stories. Hairy men, for instance."

"Ah," said Manimenesh. "You mean gorillas, from the jungles to the south. I'm sorry to spoil the story for you, but they are nothing better than beasts."

"I see," said Watunan. "That's a pity."

"My grandfather owned a gorilla once," Manimenesh said. "Even after ten years, it could barely speak Arabic."

They finished the appetizers. Slaves cleared the table and brought in a platter of fattened partridges, stuffed with lemons and eggplants, on a bed of mint and lettuce. The four diners leaned in closer and dexterously ripped off legs and wings.

Watunan sucked meat from a drumstick and belched politely. "Audoghast is famous for its cooks," he said. "I'm pleased to see that this legend, at least, is confirmed."

"We Audoghastians pride ourselves on the pleasures of table and bed," said Manimenesh, pleased. "I have asked Elfelilet, one of our premiere courtesans, to honor us with a visit tonight. She will bring her troupe of dancers."

Watunan smiled. "That would be splendid. One tires of boys on the trail. Your women are remarkable. I've noticed that they go without the veil."

Khayali lifted his voice in song. "When a woman of Audoghast appears/ The girls of Fez bite their lips,/ The dames of Tripoli hide in closets,/ And Ghana's women hang themselves."

"We take pride in the exalted status of our women," said Manimenesh. "It's not for nothing that they command a premium market price!"

In the marketplace, downhill, vendors lit tiny oil lamps, which cast a flickering glow across the walls of tents and the watering troughs. A troop of the Prince's men, with iron spears, shields, and chain-mail, marched across the plaza to take the night watch at the Eastern Gate. Slaves with heavy water-jars gossiped beside the well.

"There's quite a crowd around one of the stalls," said Bagayoko.

"So I see," said Watunan. "What is it? Some news that might affect the market?"

Bagayoko sopped up gravy with a wad of mint and lettuce. "Rumor says there's a new fortune-teller in town. New prophets always go through a vogue."

"Ah yes," said Khayali, sitting up. "They call him 'the Sufferer.' He is said to tell the most outlandish and entertaining fortunes."

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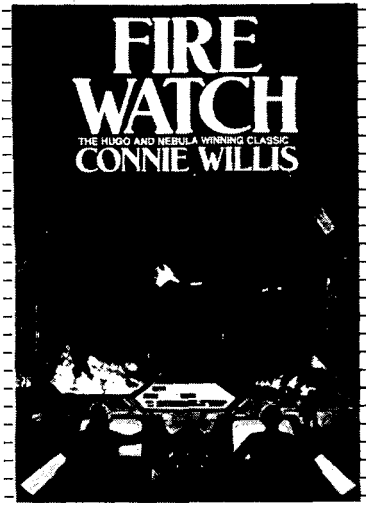

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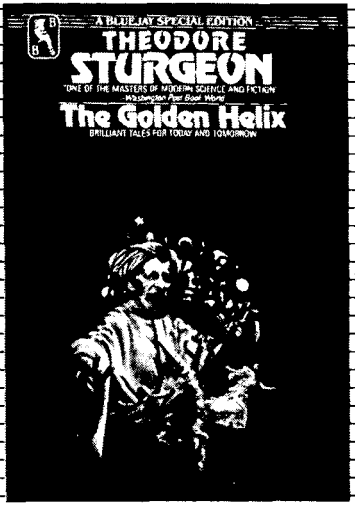
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"I wouldn't trust any fortune-teller's market tips," said Manimenesh. "If you want to know the market, you have to know the hearts of the people, and for that you need a good poet."

Khayali bowed his head. "Sir," he said, "live forever."

It was growing dark. Household slaves arrived with pottery lamps of sesame oil, which they hung from the rafters of the portico. Others took the bones of the partridges and brought in a haunch and head of lamb with a side-dish of cinnamon tripes.

As a gesture of esteem, the host offered Watunan the eyeballs, and after three ritual refusals the caravan-master dug in with relish. "I put great stock in fortune-tellers, myself," he said, munching. "They are often privy to strange secrets. Not the occult kind, but the blabbing of the superstitious. Slave-girls anxious about some household scandal, or minor officials worried over promotions—inside news from those who consult them. It can be useful."

"If that's the case," said Manimenesh, "perhaps we should call him up here."

"They say he is grotesquely ugly," said Khayali. "He is called 'the Sufferer' because he is outlandishly afflicted by disease."

Bagayoko wiped his chin elegantly on his sleeve. "Now you begin to interest me!"

"It's settled, then." Manimenesh clapped his hands. "Bring young Sidi, my errand runner!"

Sidi arrived at once, dusting flour from his hands. He was the cook's teenage son, a tall young black in a dyed woollen djellaba. His cheeks were stylishly scarred and he had bits of brass wire interwoven with his dense black locks. Manimenesh gave him his orders; Sidi leapt from the portico, ran downhill through the garden, and vanished through the gates.

The slave-dealer sighed. "This is one of the problems of my business. When I bought my cook she was a slim and lithesome wench, and I enjoyed her freely. Now years of dedication to her craft have increased her market value by twenty times, and also made her as fat as a hippopotamus, though that is beside the point. She has always claimed that Sidi is my child, and since I don't wish to sell her, I must make allowance. I have made him a freeman; I have spoiled him, I'm afraid. On my death, my legitimate sons will deal with him cruelly."

The caravan-master, having caught the implications of this speech, smiled politely. "Can he ride? Can he bargain? Can he do sums?"

"Oh," said Manimenesh with false nonchalance, "he can manage that newfangled stuff with the zeroes well enough."

"You know I am bound for China," said Watunan. "It is a hard road that brings either riches or death."

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"He runs the risk in any case," the slave-dealer said philosophically. "The riches are Allah's decision."

"This is truth," said the caravan-master. He made a secret gesture, beneath the table, where the others could not see. His host returned it, and Sidi was proposed, and accepted, for the Brotherhood.

With the night's business over, Manimenesh relaxed, and broke open the lamb's steamed skull with a silver mallet. They spooned out the brains, then attacked the tripes, which were stuffed with onion, cabbage, cinnamon, rue, coriander, cloves, ginger, pepper, and lightly dusted with ambergris. They ran out of mustard dip and called for more, eating a bit more slowly now, for they were approaching the limit of human capacity.

They then sat back, pushing away platters of congealing grease, and enjoying a profound satisfaction with the state of the world. Down in the marketplace, bats from an abandoned mosque chased moths around the vendors' lanterns.

The poet belched suavely and picked up his two-stringed guitar. "Dear God," he said, "this is a splendid place. See, caravan-master, how the stars smile down on our beloved Southwest." He drew a singing note from the leopard-gut strings. "I feel at one with Eternity."

Watunan smiled. "When I find a man like that, I have to bury him."

"There speaks the man of business," the doctor said. He unobtrusively dusted a tiny pinch of venom on the last chunk of tripe, and ate it. He accustomed himself to poison. It was a professional precaution.

From the street beyond the wall, they heard the approaching jingle of brass rings. The guard at the gate called out. "The Lady Elfelilet and her escorts, lord!"

"Make them welcome," said Manimenesh. Slaves took the platters away, and brought a velvet couch onto the spacious portico. The diners extended their hands; slaves scrubbed and towelled them clean.

Elfelilet's party came forward through the fig-clustered garden: two escorts with gold-topped staffs heavy with jingling brass rings; three dancing-girls, apprentice courtesans in blue woollen cloaks over gauzy cotton trousers and embroidered blouses; and four palanquin bearers, beefy male slaves with oiled torsos and calloused shoulders. The bearers set the palanquin down with stifled grunts of relief and opened the cloth-of-gold hangings.

Elfelilet emerged, a tawny-skinned woman, her eyes dusted in kohl and collyrium, her hennaed hair threaded with gold wire. Her palms and nails were stained pink; she wore an embroidered blue cloak over an intricate, sleeveless vest and ankle-tied silk trousers starched and polished with myrobolan lacquer. A light freckling of smallpox scars along one cheek delightfully accented her broad, moonlike face.

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"Elfelilet, my dear," said Manimenesh, "you are just in time for dessert."

Elfelilet stepped gracefully across the tiled floor and reclined face-first along the velvet couch, where the well-known loveliness of her posterior could be displayed to its best advantage. "I thank my friend and patron, the noble Manimenesh. Live forever! Learned doctor Bagayoko, I am your servant. Hello, poet."

"Hello, darling," said Khayali, smiling with the natural camaraderie of poets and courtesans. "You are the moon and your troupe of lovelies are comets across our vision."

The host said, "This is our esteemed guest, the caravan master, Abou Bekr Ahmed Ibn Watunan."

Watunan, who had been gaping in enraptured amazement, came to himself with a start. "I am a simple desert man," he said. "I haven't a poet's gift of words. But I am your ladyship's servant."

Elfelilet smiled and tossed her head; her distended earlobes clattered with heavy chunks of gold filigree. "Welcome to Audoghast."

Dessert arrived. "Well," said Manimenesh. "Our earlier dishes were rough and simple fare, but this is where we shine. Let me tempt you with these *djouzinkat* nutcakes. And do sample our honey macaroons—I believe there's enough for everyone."

Everyone, except of course for the slaves, enjoyed the light and flaky *cataif* macaroons, liberally dusted with Kairwan sugar. The nutcakes were simply beyond compare: painstakingly milled from hand-watered wheat, lovingly buttered and sugared, and artistically studded with raisins, dates, and almonds.

"We eat *djouzinkat* nutcakes during droughts," the poet said, "because the angels weep with envy when we taste them."

Manimenesh belched heroically and readjusted his skullcap. "Now," he said, "we will enjoy a little bit of grape wine. Just a small tot, mind you, so that the sin of drinking is a minor one, and we can do penance with the minimum of alms. After that, our friend the poet will recite an ode he has composed for the occasion."

Khayali began to tune his two-string guitar. "I will also, on demand, extemporize twelve-line *ghazals* in the lyric mode, upon suggested topics."

"And after our digestion has been soothed with epigrams," said their host, "we will enjoy the justly famed dancing of her ladyship's troupe. After that we will retire within the mansion and enjoy their other, equally lauded skills."

The gate-guard shouted, "Your errand-runner, Lord! He awaits your pleasure, with the fortune-teller!"

"Ah," said Manimenesh. "I had forgotten."

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"No matter, sir," said Watunan, whose imagination had been fired by the night's agenda.

Bagayoko spoke up. "Let's have a look at him. His ugliness, by contrast, will heighten the beauty of these women."

"Which would otherwise be impossible," said the poet.

"Very well," said Manimenesh. "Bring him forward."

Sidi, the errand boy, came through the garden, followed with ghastly slowness by the crutch-wielding fortune-teller.

The man inched into the lamplight like a crippled insect. His voluminous, dust-gray cloak was stained with sweat, and nameless exudations. He was an albino. His pink eyes were shrouded with cataracts, and he had lost a foot, and several fingers, to leprosy. One shoulder was much lower than the other, suggesting a hunchback, and the stub of his shin was scarred by the gnawing of canal-worms.

"Prophet's beard!" said the poet. "He is truly of surpassing ghastliness."

Elfelilet wrinkled her nose. "He reeks of pestilence!"

Sidi spoke up. "We came as fast as we could, Lord!"

"Go inside, boy," said Manimenesh, "soak ten sticks of cinnamon in a bucket of water, then come back and throw it over him."

Sidi left at once.

Watunan stared at the hideous man, who stood, quivering on one leg, at the edge of the light. "How is it, man, that you still live?"

"I have turned my sight from this world," said the Sufferer. "I turned my sight to God, and He poured knowledge copiously upon me. I have inherited a knowledge which no mortal body can support."

"But God is merciful," said Watunan. "How can you claim this to be His doing?"

"If you do not fear God," said the fortune-teller, "fear Him after seeing me." The hideous albino lowered himself, with arthritic, aching slowness, to the dirt outside the portico. He spoke again. "You are right, caravan-master, to think that death would be a mercy to me. But death comes in its own time, as it will to all of you."

Manimenesh cleared his throat. "Can you see our destinies, then?"

"I see the world," said the Sufferer. "To see the fate of one man is to follow a single ant in a hill."

Sidi reemerged and poured the scented water over the cripple. The fortune-teller cupped his maimed hands and drank. "Thank you, boy," he said. He turned his clouded eyes on the youth. "Your children will be yellow."

Sidi laughed, startled. "Yellow? Why?"

"Your wives will be yellow."

The dancing-girls, who had moved to the far side of the table, giggled

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in unison. Bagayoko pulled a gold coin from within his sleeve. "I will give you this gold dirham if you will show me your body."

Elfelilet frowned prettily and blinked her kohl-smeared lashes. "Oh, learned doctor, please spare us."

"You will see my body, sir, if you have patience," said the Sufferer. "As yet, the people of Audoghast laugh at my prophecies. I am doomed to tell the truth, which is harsh and cruel, and therefore absurd. As my fame grows, however, it will reach the ears of your Prince, who will then order you to remove me as a threat to public order. You will then sprinkle your favorite poison, powdered asp venom, into a bowl of chickpea soup I will receive from a customer. I bear you no grudge for this, as it will be your civic duty, and will relieve me of pain."

"What an odd notion," said Bagayoko, frowning. "I see no need for the Prince to call on my services. One of his spearmen could puncture you like a water-skin."

"By then," the prophet said, "my occult powers will have roused so much uneasiness that it will seem best to take extreme measures."

"Well," said Bagayoko, "that's convenient, if exceedingly grotesque."

"Unlike other prophets," said the Sufferer, "I see the future not as one might wish it to be, but in all its cataclysmic and blind futility. That is why I have come here, to your delightful city. My numerous and totally accurate prophecies will vanish when this city does. This will spare the world any troublesome conflicts of predestination and free will."

"He is a theologian!" the poet said. "A leper theologian—it's a shame my professors in Timbuktu aren't here to debate him!"

"You prophesy doom for our city?" said Manimenesh.

"Yes. I will be specific. This is the year 406 of the Prophet's Hejira, and one thousand and fourteen years since the birth of Christ. In forty years, a puritan and fanatical cult of Moslems will arise, known as the Almoravids. At that time, Audoghast will be an ally of the Ghana Empire, who are idol-worshippers. Ibn Yasin, the warrior saint of the Almoravids, will condemn Audoghast as a nest of pagans. He will set his horde of desert marauders against the city; they will be enflamed by righteousness and greed. They will slaughter the men, and rape and enslave the women. Audoghast will be sacked, the wells will be poisoned, and cropland will wither and blow away. In a hundred years, sand dunes will bury the ruins. In five hundred years, Audoghast will survive only as a few dozen lines of narrative in the travel books of Arab scholars."

Khayali shifted his guitar. "But the libraries of Timbuktu are full of books on Audoghast, including, if I may say so, our immortal tradition of poetry."

"I have not yet mentioned Timbuktu," said the prophet, "which will

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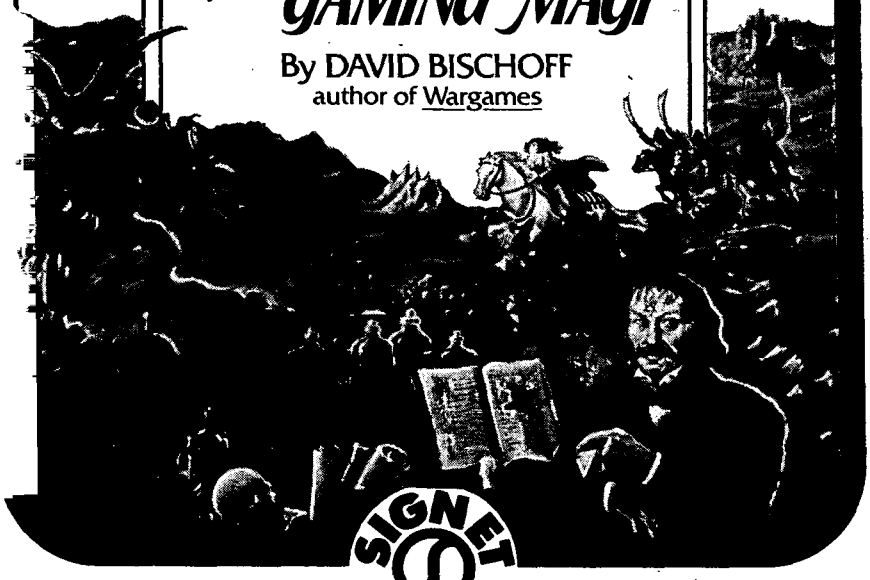

SIGNET FANTASY

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be sacked by Moorish invaders led by a blond Spanish eunuch. They will feed the books to goats."

The company burst into incredulous laughter. Unperturbed, the prophet said, "The ruin will be so general, so thorough, and so all-encompassing, that in future centuries it will be stated, and believed, that West Africa was always a land of savages."

"Who in the world could make such a slander?" said the poet.

"They will be Europeans, who will emerge from their current squalid decline, and arm themselves with mighty sciences."

"What happens then?" said Bagayoko, smiling.

"I can look at those future ages," said the prophet, "but I prefer not to do so, as it makes my head hurt."

"You prophesy, then," said Manimenesh, "that our far-famed metropolis, with its towering mosques and armed militia, will be reduced to utter desolation."

"Such is the truth, regrettable as it may be. You, and all you love, will leave no trace in this world, except a few lines in the writing of strangers."

"And our city will fall to savage tribesmen?"

The Sufferer said, "No one here will witness the disaster to come. You will live out your lives, year after year, enjoying ease and luxury, not because you deserve it, but simply because of blind fate. In time you will forget this night; you will forget all I have said, just as the world will forget you and your city. When Audoghast falls, this boy Sidi, this son of a slave, will be the only survivor of this night's gathering. By then he too will have forgotten Audoghast, which he has no cause to love. He will be a rich old merchant in Ch'ang-an, which is a Chinese city of such fantastic wealth that it could buy ten Audoghasts, and which will not be sacked and annihilated until a considerably later date."

"This is madness," said Watunan.

Bagayoko twirled a crusted lock of mud-smeared hair in his supple fingers. "Your gate guard is a husky lad, friend Manimenesh. What say we have him bash this storm-crow's head in, and haul him out to be hyena food?"

"For that, doctor," said the Sufferer, "I will tell you the manner of your death. You will be killed by the Ghanaian royal guard, while attempting to kill the crown prince by blowing a subtle poison into his anus with a hollow reed."

Bagayoko started. "You idiot, there is no crown prince."

"He was conceived yesterday."

Bagayoko turned impatiently to the host. "Let us rid ourselves of this prodigy!"

Manimenesh nodded sternly. "Sufferer, you have insulted my guests and my city. You are lucky to leave my home alive."

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The Sufferer hauled himself with agonizing slowness to his single foot. "Your boy spoke to me of your generosity."

"What! Not one copper for your drivelling."

"Give me one of the gold dirhams from your purse. Otherwise I shall be forced to continue prophesying, and in a more intimate vein."

Manimenesh considered this. "Perhaps it's best." He threw Sidi a coin. "Give this to the madman and escort him back to his raving-booth."

They waited in tormented patience as the fortune-teller creaked and crutched, with painful slowness, into the darkness.

Manimenesh, brusquely, threw out his red velvet sleeves and clapped for wine. "Give us a song, Khayali."

The poet pulled the cowl of his cloak over his head. "My head rings with an awful silence," he said. "I see all waymarks effaced, the joyous pleasances converted into barren wilderness. Jackals resort here, ghosts frolic, and demons sport; the gracious halls, and rich boudoirs, that once shone like the sun, now, overwhelmed by desolation, seem like the gaping mouths of savage beasts!" He looked at the dancing-girls, his eyes brimming with tears. "I picture these maidens, lying beneath the dust, or dispersed to distant parts and far regions, scattered by the hand of exile, torn to pieces by the fingers of expatriation."

Manimenesh smiled on him kindly. "My boy," he said, "if others cannot hear your songs, or embrace these women, or drink this wine, the loss is not ours, but theirs. Let us, then, enjoy all three, and let those unborn do the regretting."

"Your patron is wise," said Ibn Watunan, patting the poet on the shoulder. "You see him here, favored by Allah with every luxury; and you saw that filthy madman, bedevilled by plague. That lunatic, who pretends to great wisdom, only croaks of ruin; while our industrious friend makes the world a better place, by fostering nobility and learning. Could God forsake a city like this, with all its charms, to bring about that fool's disgusting prophesies?" He lifted his cup to Elfelilet, and drank deeply.

"But delightful Audoghast," said the poet, weeping. "All our loveliness, lost to the sands."

"The world is wide," said Bagayoko, "and the years are long. It is not for us to claim immortality, not even if we are poets. But take comfort, my friend. Even if these walls and buildings crumble, there will always be a place like Audoghast, as long as men love profit! The mines are inexhaustible, and elephants are thick as fleas. Mother Africa will always give us gold and ivory."

"Always?" said the poet hopefully, dabbing at his eyes.

"Well, surely there are always slaves," said Manimenesh, and smiled, and winked. The others laughed with him, and there was joy again. ●

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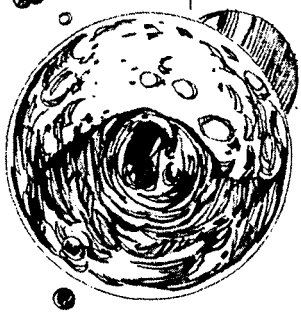

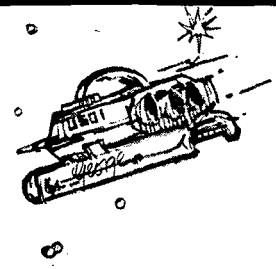

SHIPWRECKED ON DESTINY FIVE

An ocean clotted with pink algae
—their floral
Cycles of tiny outgassing
Fill the air
With the clamor of a million violins

weedy tissues
Woven into rocks—that seem to pulsate
Altering their hue
With the pattern of our voices

Mists of metallic particles
gathering in shapes
That tease & respond to the artistry of our despair

The whistling body of the atmosphere
Lowers upon us like a mountain
The very pores of skyflesh
appearing
In skeins & sinews of the airflow
Opening like graves of light around our heads

The chromium bones
our landing craft become
A lost language of shiny objects
—the sacred gears
Of a god machine

& we must tread among these
warped totems
A crew of empty spacesuits
Mantled in corrosive
& caressing spume
Remote-controlled
By a host of artificial memories
motiveless, we must continue
Searching
For some piece of fallen science

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ground down
To our knees by the heavy gravity
Until we assume
our final
& somehow mystical
Postures
forming a tradition
Of abstract sculpture
Scattered along a scarlet beach

Final communiqué: long wanderings
near the edge
Of the so-called "fractured" terrain
Where night is always falling

The largest of three suns
is tidally distorted
perpetually
Smeared above the south horizon
while the smallest
When eclipsed, burns a hole
Right through that giant's helium husk

None of us has spoken
much this morning
Since we sighted the Carven Cliffs
spectro-
Analyzed from orbit: walls of unnatural smoothness
reflective as water
But splashed at intervals
By a dark symbology

We buried Johnson there
Another case of petrifaction
—why
Should they all freeze
In that characteristic attitude
lacking instruments
It's sometimes difficult to tell
Death from life
there are nine of us left

Other phenomena, so far
Unreported: surely no miracles
Only a few
Sensory tricks—auguries in clear weather

the floating columns
Of indeterminate size
& substance—still pacing us in our travels
Like spirit-stanchions, an all-surveying
Ennead
the guardians
Of an abandoned world?—or the roving
Geometric shadows of our minds

—Andrew Joron

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THE TREE OF DREAMS

art: Mike Hinge

by Scott Russell Sanders

Mr. Sanders' fiction has recently been collected into two books, *Wilderness Plots* and *Fetching the Dead.* He says that lately, much of his writing has been about limestone, deer, forests, and birds, and that his next move will be into caves.

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"Have you noticed how there aren't nearly so many different kinds of dreams anymore?" said the man who had taken a seat next to Veronica on the park bench. He was in his mid-twenties, bearded, bespectacled, with the secretive air of a smuggler. "The few dreams that are left," he whispered, "are so threadbare you can see right through them." Without looking at her, the man leaned toward Veronica and spoke in a conspiratorial murmur, as if trying to woo her into his private mania: "It comes from the cutting down of all these trees, you know. There's no place for the dreams to roost in the daytime. I can remember when this entire park was a hardwood forest."

Ordinarily, when a strange man addressed her, Veronica would either have glared at him until he fell silent, or else, if he were too large or too bold for such measures, she would have walked quickly away. But she was struck by the truth in what he said. She was also struck by his shyness. Through his metal-framed glasses he peered furtively in every direction but hers. Since escaping from adolescence with a face and physique that stopped men dead in their tracks, Veronica had resigned herself to being stared at. But simply because she was a feast for men's eyes was no reason for her to satisfy their ears with speech; and thusordinarily she would not have given a strange man the time of day. Yet this conspirator who joined her one April morning on the park bench, with his aura of bruised meekness and his talk of trees and dreams, proved to be the exact enticement needed to lure Veronica out of her solitude.

Now a ripe woman of twenty-five, with men clamoring for entry at her gates, she had for some years been spending her free hours alone. "The boys will forget you exist," her mother warned. "I can think of worse outcomes," replied Veronica. "Let the bees buzz while you're in blossom," advised her mother. Veronica bit her tongue and kept to her solitary ways.

The intense blackness of her hair and the paleness of her skin made the men who saw her forget about the invention of color. For minutes after she passed, bending their vision the way a neutron star will bend the angle of light, they saw the world in black and white. Although she did nothing to enhance what nature had blessed her with, neither padding nor painting, wherever she went Veronica could not help but feel the men flinging after her their lassos of yearning.

In the emergency room of the hospital, where she handled the broken bodies of accident victims, she chose to work the graveyard shift, because at night there were fewer doctors around to stroke her with their presumptuous fingers. The bleary-eyed interns were usually so tired they could only give her speculative stares, as if they were studying the menu posted outside a new restaurant, and the male nurses had learned to fear

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her wrath. "Hazardous territory," they muttered to one another as she passed by them shoving carts full of moaners and wailers.

Of course night was the prime time for accidents. With the onset of darkness, people took leave of their senses. Husbands hammered their wives with fists and shovels. Mothers, fed up from a day's crying, heaved their infants at the nearest wall. Wakeful babies swallowed any bite-sized object within reach. The doors of medicine cabinets whispered invitations to desolate insomniacs. Sleeping pills, they whispered. Razor blades. Bandages for the heart. From the saloons of the city, drunks cruised away on swerving paths like meteors, eventually colliding with other cars or fire hydrants. Muggers worked the sidewalks. On the graveyard shift, wave after wave of sirens lapped against the glass doors of the emergency room.

"It just beats me, why you keep on working nights," her father said, in the tone of baffled affection that he had used toward Veronica since her adolescent blossoming. "With all your seniority, you could get on evening shift for sure. Maybe even straight days."

"It's terribly inconvenient," said her mother. "When the boys call and find out you're asleep at such odd hours, they become discouraged."

"Would a doctor be such a catastrophe for a boyfriend?" her father said. "Every night surrounded by surgeons, a little flick of their fingers worth a thousand dollars, and you won't so much as look at them. Is it the money you hate, or what?"

Sighing melodramatically, her mother complained, "It's us she hates. She's punishing us, as if we had anything to do with her good looks!"

"Okay," her father conceded. "Maybe the doctors are all creeps. But there's other fish in the sea. Right? What do you say, instead of taking judo classes in the afternoons, you go to a matinee with that vice president from the bank? He gets off at three. And don't forget that bowling alley magnate, or that architect who designs pizza stands. Those guys come and go whenever they please."

Veronica gritted her perfect teeth. "*Daddy*," she said.

Whereupon her mother warned ominously, "The best looks in the world are temporary, Veronica. Catch something with them while you can. Do you want to be a night shift nurse for the rest of your life?"

No, Veronica did not want to be a nurse of any description forever. But she could not think what else to become. Whichever means of escape she considered, she imagined the way lined by men with clubs uplifted like a gantlet of savages. She felt so mystified by the simplicity of their drives and hungers that she suspected, contrary to everything she had been told in nursing school, that men had evolved separately from women; or perhaps, like horseshoe crabs dragging their ancient hungers season

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after season onto the same moonlit beach, men had been trapped long ago in some evolutionary cul-de-sac.

For the present, Veronica did not mind working the midnight hours. After supper she changed into her uniform of white—thick stockings designed to camouflage her legs, white underthings and loose-fitting nylon dress, sturdy oxford shoes and starchy cap. Veronica had once hoped to become invisible in this outfit, but the men gaped at her as if she were a galleon under full sail. In their inflamed primordial eyes her innocent white garments seemed to bulge with the breezes of desire.

Shortly after nine on work nights she drove from the city, which was a sprawl of lights at the junction of three rivers, up onto the ridge where the hospital squatted. She always arrived early and parked her car at the edge of the lot. From that vantage point, she could see the looping crescents of lights marking the spans of bridges, the glare of blast furnaces, the blue jets of flame above the refinery, the luminous steam drifting in continents of rose-colored clouds above the mills. But her chief delight, as constellations of lights flickered on in the river valley, was to watch the dream creatures gliding away from the hospital's enormous shade trees to go haunt the bedrooms of the sleeping city.

Once she clocked in for work, the time passed quickly. It was a storm of bones and blood, torn muscles, split skin, a thousand variations on the elemental note of pain. During the lulls between emergencies, she wrote lists on prescription pads—lists of proverbs, of colors, of state capitals, lists of the species of fish native to the Great Lakes, lists of companies devoted to the manufacture of chewing gum, lists of painters and celestial objects, lists of anything at all that she could dredge up from her brain. The secret of an agile mind, she believed, was the exercise of memory. Look at the aged senators and judges, some of them too feeble to stand upright, and yet they could rattle off statistics on television better than high school debaters. Catching her busy at this, one of her admirers would occasionally ask, "What are you doing, gorgeous?" "Exercising my brain instead of my tongue," she would answer.

At any given time, Veronica usually kept two or three dozen lists in the hip pocket of her nurse's uniform. While hoisting the bottle for a blood transfusion, she might recall the name of burnt sienna. Or while wrestling a junkie into a restraining harness, she might suddenly think of Boise, Idaho. And then at the next opportunity she would add those items to her lists of colors and state capitals. When a list grew stale, she wadded it up and threw it away. There were men in the emergency room who salvaged these arcane documents from the waste basket, smoothed them out, and studied them in hopes of discovering a code that would open a way through the formidable defenses of her heart.

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Veronica's favorite moment arrived at six in the morning, after she was released from the emergency room. In cold weather she sat in her car and gazed down at the incandescent city. In mild weather she watched from a bench underneath the flaking branches of a stupendous sycamore. As alarm clocks rang and sleepers awoke, the dream creatures slipped away from bedsides and came wafting up out of the valley in their thousands and tens of thousands to roost in the aged trees surrounding the hospital. Judging by their size and gaudy colors, they might have been a flock of parrots. Yet they made little noise, only a dry chittering scarcely distinguishable from the sound of wind in leaves. Hearing it was a comfort to Veronica. She imagined they were exchanging notes about the dreams they had visited upon the sleepers of the city.

Back in her childhood, when this ridge was still a government forest and Veronica used to come camping here with her parents, the dream figures had seemed quite large to her, and frightening. With their talons and beaks, their hooked hands and barbed tails and tentacles, they had seemed perfectly capable of tearing her limb from limb. But when she fearfully pointed them out, her parents gave her puzzled looks. "Monsters in the trees!" her mother echoed indulgently.

"We'll just see about that," her father laughed, shining his flashlight up into the branches. The ray bored straight through the dream creatures, taking on a dark shade of purple from a pirate, a minty green from a swollen frog. "There, you see," said her father, gazing up dauntlessly along the shafts of light, "nothing at all for my little girl to worry about." "Wherever did you get such an outlandish fear?" her mother chided.

Seeing how transparent the creatures were to light and to her parents' vision, Veronica ceased at that early age either to fear or to speak of them. Later, when she tried recording the treetop chatter, the tape caught only the sound of windblown leaves. And the photographs she took of the roosting figures showed only smudges of lurid color. At every opportunity during childhood she begged to go up to that park for campouts, because, of all the places she had visited, this ridge alone proved to be a roosting place for the night visitors. From the first, she knew perfectly well what they were, these miniature goblins and beasts, these shaggy wolves, these clowns and demonic scientists. Many of them she recognized from her own dreams, especially the nightmare bugaboos, and some of the ones she had never met in her own sleep—the hunter, the drowned sailor, the alchemist—were described for her by playmates. It had seemed reasonable to her, at age five or six, that the inhabitants of dreams should spend the daylight hours resting from their night's labors.

Of course there was also a modest call for dreams in the daytime, to lubricate the naps of babies and old people and to enliven the fretful snoozes of those who worked the graveyard shift. And accordingly, on

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these mornings when Veronica finished her stint in the emergency room and sat watching the dream creatures return in flocks from the city, a few that had been roosting in the trees bestirred themselves and swooped down into the river valley, one or another of them eventually bound, perhaps, for Veronica's own bedroom. Occasionally she would notice a distinctive dragon or witch or steely-eyed soldier gliding away on one of these daytime jaunts, and later she would meet with the very same specter in her dreams. As a general rule, she believed, a sleeper enjoyed a wider choice of visitors in the daytime than at night—which was an additional reason for working the graveyard shift.

Before the onset of her cataclysmic beauty, back in those innocent days when the girls still looked at her without malice and the boys without lust, she would sometimes bring friends up to the park at dusk, to see whether they noticed the parrot-colored specters swooping out on dream visits. Even though she led her friends to the most populous roosting trees, only one playmate—a languid boy with sunken cheeks and sweaty hair glued to his forehead—ever seemed to be aware of the whispering flocks. "Do you hear that?" he said to her one night. "It's like the sound of river rapids far away." Another evening he squinted up into the bustling air and observed, "The sky is full of patches." "What sort of patches?" Veronica demanded hopefully. "Like somebody shaking a crazy quilt," said the boy. Soon after making his confession, this lone playmate with sympathetic eyes took to his bed and died of leukemia. Veronica was left to enjoy or suffer her peculiar vision alone.

Like the magnetic power she exerted unwillingly over the hearts of men, this ability to see the denizens of dreams was as much a curse as a gift. The spectacle of these gaudy flocks swirling in the moonlit sky was glorious. But it was also private, an unshared splendor.

Thus it came about that when a bearded stranger with an air of hereditary meekness sat down next to her on the park bench at dawn one April day, and murmured without looking at her, "Have you noticed how there aren't nearly so many different kinds of dreams anymore?" at first Veonica made to rise from her seat, but the weight of his words sat her back down again, and she felt the pressure of a reply rising within her.

"It comes from the cutting down of all these trees, you know," the man confided. "There's no place for the dreams to roost in the daytime. I can remember when this entire park was a hardwood forest."

"So can I," Veronica agreed. "It was lovely. There were ever so many more dreams in those days." She quickly put a hand to her mouth, but the words had already escaped.

The man tugged at his spindly beard, which made up for what it lacked

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in thickness by the exuberance of the individual whiskers. "And have you noticed how the city keeps growing and the forest keeps shrinking?"

"It worries me," Veronica conceded.

"How long can it go on before things break down completely? That's what I'd like to know."

"A very good question," said Veronica noncommittally.

"It's getting to where there aren't enough dreams to go around. Some people get only half a sleep's worth, and others do without altogether. Is it any wonder the hospital's so busy? The city is going stark raving mad from lack of dreams."

Veronica had long been troubled by the same perception. She stole a glance at her visitor. He was about her age, she guessed, blond of hair and beard, with fine features that had been roughened by hardship, as if he had just returned from a trip to Antarctica. His face had the pale sheen of fluorescent lights, and his body was so thin he might have been feeding on carrots and wind. His eyes, which appeared through his glasses like blue pebbles at the bottom of a creek, kept shifting constantly, yet they never turned in her direction. She sensed a dangerous allure in his frailty and shyness.

Nervously smoothing her skirt, she announced, "I really must be going."

Before she could gather her purse and jacket, however, the stranger was already standing. "I didn't mean to bother you," he said. His thin frame seemed to sway in the morning breeze.

Flustered, Veronica said, "No, no, it's just that my parents will be expecting me."

"I have bored you with my theories."

"Not in the least. They're quite interesting."

"I have mistaken your reasons for watching the sunrise," the stranger declared in a formal manner. "I will trouble you no longer." He gave a stiff bow from the waist, eyes still averted, and walked away from the bench.

On an impulse Veronica stood up and called after him, "It's no mistake!"

As if not hearing, the man continued his solemn march to the parking lot, where he climbed into a mud-splattered jeep. Veronica forced herself to keep watching the gulf of air above the river, from which the morning's last dream-flocks were rising.

That night as usual she arrived early for work, and the next morning she stayed after, but instead of sitting on the bench she watched the shimmering flights from her car. All the while she was intensely aware of the man sitting nearby in his jeep. They kept on like this for several days more, each avoiding the bench. Then one morning of vivid sunrise,

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when Veronica walked out to the parking lot, the man was sitting cross-legged on the hood of his jeep. She had as much right to fresh air as he did, she decided, and leaned defiantly against the hood of her own car. After a while the man slid down and ambled away across the lawn. Veronica strolled in the opposite direction. Each one traced an elliptical path over the grass, and the two of them reached the bench at the same moment.

"Please go ahead," the man said, making his stiff bow.

"No, you," Veronica insisted.

"I don't mind standing."

"Well, if this isn't ridiculous," said Veronica, flouncing down onto the seat. "There's room for both of us. Go on, sit. *Sit.* What do I care?"

The man sagged onto the far end of the bench. "I promise not to pester you with my notions," he said. "It's just that one doesn't often get the opportunity of discussing them with a sympathetic—" He caught himself in mid-confession, and fell silent.

The sky was a flurry of gaudy specters. Above each of the antique shade trees along the ridge there was a swirling knot of color as the returning dream creatures hunted for roosts. The splendor of it shook Veronica into speech. "What does it look like to you?" she said.

The man clumsily shifted his feet. "It looks like an explosion in a gypsy laundry."

"Only patches of colors? Or can you make out shapes, too?"

By way of answer, he pointed at one after another of the soaring bodies and named them: "There's a fox, see there! And look, a tangle of snakes, a burned pilot, a burglar, a fat lady, a card player with a green eyeshade."

"Yes," Veronica agreed, her own arm lifting to point as the last morning flocks arrived from the city, "and there's a lumberjack with a chain saw. An octopus! A peacock! And that scary one in the lab coat—what would you guess he is?"

"A physicist," said the stranger. "The most terrifying figure of all."

Never having spoken of these matters with anyone, Veronica felt as though after wandering for twenty-five years through foreign lands she had at last stumbled into someone who shared her native tongue. "I've always wondered where the dream furniture is kept," she said. "You know, the bulky things like rockets and cupboards. And the scenery—cliffs, castles, caves. They don't seem to lug very much on their trips to the city."

"I think they leave the props dissolved in the air of bedrooms, and only precipitate out what they need for a given dream. When you're lying in bed, have you ever noticed the shadows up in the corners next to the ceiling?"

"Why, yes, I have," said Veronica.

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"And have you ever noticed how, when you sleep in somebody else's house, the scenery and props are all different from the ones at home? And when you sleep outdoors, in a tent, you know, or a hammock, how skimpy your dreams are?"

Forgetting herself altogether, Veronica cried, "Yes! Yes!"

He leaned closer, almost touching her shoulder, and she could see the individual whiskers emerging from the skin of his cheek. "You see, it's not so crazy, is it?" he whispered.

"It makes perfect sense to me," said Veronica, and it was as if she had uncaged a dictionary, so recklessly did the words pour out of him. His name was Martin, he informed her, and he was an x-ray technician at the hospital. A desire to enjoy richer dreams had led him to volunteer recently for the graveyard shift, so that his days would be free for sleeping. He lived alone, his parents having retired to a cottage on a golf course in Arizona, and he taped notes onto the stove and refrigerator to remind himself to eat. He had studied physics in college, which was how he knew that the figure in white bent over the diagram of a cyclotron was the most terrifying inhabitant of dreams. Despite the lead apron he wore at work, the x-rays were causing him to lose his hair. The glow in the fillings of his teeth was an annual source of amazement to his dentist. Spending so many hours studying the ghostly images of bones, he was beginning to doubt the substantiality of the world.

"Take you, for example," he concluded, still turned shyly away. "I saw you out here on this bench every morning for a week before I convinced myself there was really a woman here, dream-watching."

"How could you be sure that's what I was doing?"

"I could see the rays cast by your eyes."

Veronica remembered the beam of her father's flashlight shining up through the branches of the sycamore, the shaft of light piercing the dream creatures. Why should the beams of her sight be any less visible to this furtive stranger?

With an abrupt movement Martin drew a slip of paper from his pocket and hurriedly wrote something down. "Excuse me," he said, "but I just remembered the name of a boxer."

A gust of clairvoyance blew through Veronica's soul. With utter certainty, she declared, "You keep lists."

"Do you?" he asked eagerly.

Veronica gave a sharp nod of agreement and pulled a bundle of dog-eared notes from her pocket. "It's how I pass the time."

"Me too. Sometimes I go half an hour between x-rays."

"Well," said Veronica reluctantly, "the show's over for today."

Martin squinted at the brightening sky. "So it is, so it is." He stood up, fragile-seeming, rather lost. "Time to go sleep."

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Before she could catch herself, Veronica said, "Sweet dreams."

Later that day, after the customary grilling at breakfast from her parents—"Would you answer the call from that bowling alley guy? You're off Saturday night, I told him. Right? And didn't you used to love bowling?"—Veronica fell asleep in the bathtub and dreamed of x-rays. Flying spiders were spinning diaphanous skeins of them, until the entire sky was a web of x-rays, and clouds were snagged in place and airplanes could not get through. She was awakened by the pungent smell of pizza.

"It's from that architect," her mother announced, carrying the steaming dish into the greenhouse air of the bathroom. "They just cut the ribbon on a new place he designed, and he wanted you to have the first bite. What could you ask for more thoughtful than that, eh?"

"If that pizza were the last food on the planet, I wouldn't eat it," said Veronica. As she rose from the tub her mother surveyed her up and down and repeated a favorite remark:

"You could pose for statues."

A statue was what Veronica felt like sometimes, more stone than flesh. But just now, buffing herself dry with a towel, recalling the secretive turns of Martin's voice, she felt a warmth spreading outward from the hollows of her bones.

Without any spoken arrangement, the two of them began arriving earlier for work in the evenings and departing later in the mornings. In dry weather they sat on the bench underneath the sycamore; in wet, they huddled in Martin's jeep, because the sound of the rain on the jeep's uninsulated roof sent shivers of pleasure through both of them. "It always reminds me of how tiny we are!" shouted Martin one night during an electrical storm.

"I know exactly what you mean!" Veronica shouted back. By imperceptible stages she had grown used to having Martin's creek-pebble eyes fixed on her. Instead of bruising her, as the gaze of other men had always done, his gaze seemed to open the cocoon of her flesh and set her free. The graze of his fingernail along her forearm was like the parting of a zipper.

Martin rarely brought anything for his evening meal, claiming that he was not hungry, and so Veronica began carrying extra food in her plastic cooler. Boiled eggs, turkey slices, blueberry muffins, unsweetened yogurt, all these and more she dished out to him, and he ate obediently. After several weeks of this patient stuffing, Martin's cheeks began to fill out and his skin took on the earthy glow of bisque pottery.

"You'll ruin your figure," her mother cautioned, when she noticed Veronica packing so much food for work. By way of answer, Veronica

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sang a nonsense trill, and her mother knew the weather of the girl's affections had shifted. "So who is it?" said the mother.

Unable to dodge her mother's intuition but unwilling to reveal the truth, Veronica replied, "It's somebody at work."

"At work!" echoed her mother. "Tony!" she yelled into the den, where a self-hypnosis tape was playing. "Come listen to this!"

Veronica's father shuffled into the kitchen, his eyes still blurred from peering into the hypnotic whirlpool. "Listen to what?"

"Our little Ronnie has taken up with somebody at work," the mother proclaimed.

The father's eyes came swiftly into focus. "Like who? A doctor? One of those doctors who keeps calling you up?"

"A brain surgeon," said Veronica, overcome by the temptation of satisfying her parents' hunger. "He's one of the few people in the world who can sever the corpus callosum and sew it back together again." Her parents gave a nod of profound respect. "And he invests in franchises," Veronica continued impetuously, "in weight-loss parlors, cash-and-carry lumberyards, that sort of thing. He has a separate telephone just for talking with his stock broker."

"A brain surgeon, no less!" A beatific smile cracked her father's face. "All I ask, Ronnie," he said, kissing her where the pitch-black hair parted on top of her head, "is that you don't move in with him until you've got a ring."

"And all the more reason not to ruin your figure!" her mother warned.

Quite aside from the fact that Veronica was not eating those extra apples and cheeses and walnuts she packed in her cooler for Martin, she was in no danger of losing her sensual allure. The more evenings and mornings she spent talking with Martin beneath the sycamore, or inside his rain-hammered jeep, watching the dream creatures dally in the sky, feeling his gaze wash over her skin like a creek, brushing fingers against fingers, the more she glowed from the intensity of her beauty. Mesmerized by her, men at the hospital sometimes banged into closed doors or spilled trays of instruments. More than once an emergency room doctor, glancing up from a patient to issue a command, snagged his gaze on her and forgot what it was he meant to say. What other women felt toward her had evolved beyond envy and malice into a chastened awe, as if in their eyes she had become another example of nature's inexplicable prodigality, alongside white corpuscles and supernovae and the aurora borealis.

Once or twice each night, Martin slipped away from the x-ray unit and went to the emergency room on the pretense of business. "Here's a scan for that head-on collision case," he might say to Veronica, bending so close that other men, watching jealously, expected his face to be twisted

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out of shape by the strength of her magnetic field. And once or twice each night, Veronica delivered a fresh victim to the x-ray unit, where Martin greeted her in his lead-lined apron. Their hands lingered as they exchanged the ghostly images of bones. Both lost the habit of keeping lists.

As hot weather rolled into the river valley, angry sleepers, bored with threadbare dreams and fangless nightmares, began heaving clock radios on the floor. Wrung-out children invented new forms of mischief. They lit matches and worshipped flames. They tested the vulnerability of skin. Confused by a flight of geese, an airline pilot crashed his load of passengers into an oil refinery, which exploded. Some prostitutes took the precaution of wearing helmets, to protect themselves from the embrace of bitter customers. The traffickers in drugs, in an effort to keep up with the demand for oblivion, started mixing angel dust in their dope. The fingers of policemen grew sweaty on triggers.

Ambulances began arriving at the doors of the hospital in unbroken procession, and Martin and Veronica could no longer find time for visits. Exhausted, they would collapse onto the bench shortly after six in the mornings. "If this keeps up," Veronica observed one day, "they'll have to stack the bodies on the lawn. We can't handle any more."

"It *will* keep up," Martin predicted. "There's just not enough dreams to go around."

For some weeks now they had been complaining about their own dreams, which were becoming transparent from overuse. "As soon as the Nazi storm trooper goose steps in," said Veronica, "I know every trick that's up his sleeve. I can see he's fagged out from all the sleepwork he's been doing. He doesn't even *scare* me anymore," she cried. "It's the same with the elephant and the ringing telephone. None of the old standbys convince me. Waterfalls, cats, headless horsemen—as soon as one shows up in a dream I know it's a fake. Nothing *captures* me anymore."

"You wake up feeling cross and frazzled," Martin put in.

"Exactly. It's as if I'd never slept."

The corridors of the hospital filled up with cartloads of moaning patients. Soon the cafeteria was commandeered for use as well. To Veronica and Martin, sharing their boiled eggs and yogurt before work, or holding hands in mutual fatigue afterward, it seemed as though the city was besieged by its own citizens.

In June, when the aluminum workers went on strike down in the valley, surveyors up on the ridge began marking out an area of the park where the hospital annex would be constructed. In July the last steel plants along the river shut down for good, put out of business by foreign competitors, and bulldozers in the park began scraping the earth flat.

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Just before the beginning of graveyard shift one night in August, Martin and Veronica were in the jeep listening to music when the mayor came on the radio to announce that he was doubling the police patrols. Order would be restored, he vowed solemnly. The heat could not go on forever. Firemen would be stationed at hydrants to spray inflamed children. Jobs would be found for teenagers. Unemployment benefits would be extended. Truckloads of barbiturates were on their way to neighborhood pharmacies. Despite rumors to the contrary, he wanted to assure his listeners that the city was invulnerable to nuclear attack. The leaks at chemical dumps would be plugged. There was enough electricity to go around. The new construction at the municipal hospital was proceeding ahead of schedule, he assured his audience, and some new wards might be open by next spring. Calm down, good people, said the mayor. Calm down.

"There it goes," Martin declared.

"The point of no return," said Veronica.

They worked grimly all that night, too busy with fresh victims even to look up from their work. Next morning the light was just breaking when they slumped wearily onto the bench. The air was syrupy with the grating roar of bulldozers and the whine of chain saws. Several of the gigantic shade trees—maples and hickories and a rare ginkgo—had already been cut down. The returning dream creatures swirled in the air above the spots where the crowns of the trees had stood. Martin and Veronica watched the bewildered circling only for a short while, until the grip of their sadness forced them to look aside. When they risked another look, the homeless specters were dwindling away toward the horizon, like colored confetti hurled along by the wind.

The lovers were still clinging to one another when two men in hard hats came to move their bench a safe distance from the doomed sycamore. The chain saws rang. Without trusting herself to speak, Veronica climbed into Martin's jeep and rode home with him to his prim cottage. Silently, she undid the white buttons of her nurse's dress, loosened the hooks and bands of her white underthings, and spread the fan of her black hair on Martin's pillow. They lay with their dazzling limbs entwined all through the daylight hours, wakeful, whispering, unvisited by dreams, and were still fused together by the heat of their consoling passion at dusk, when the last of the old trees fell. Outside, the streets rattled with gunfire and boomed with explosions. All that night, and for all the nights thereafter, the sirens of the city never stopped wailing. ●

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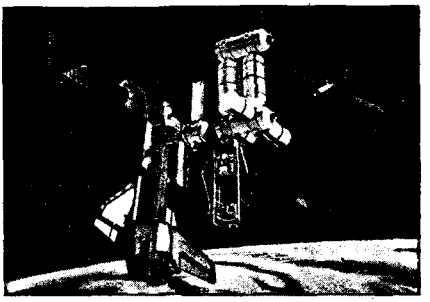

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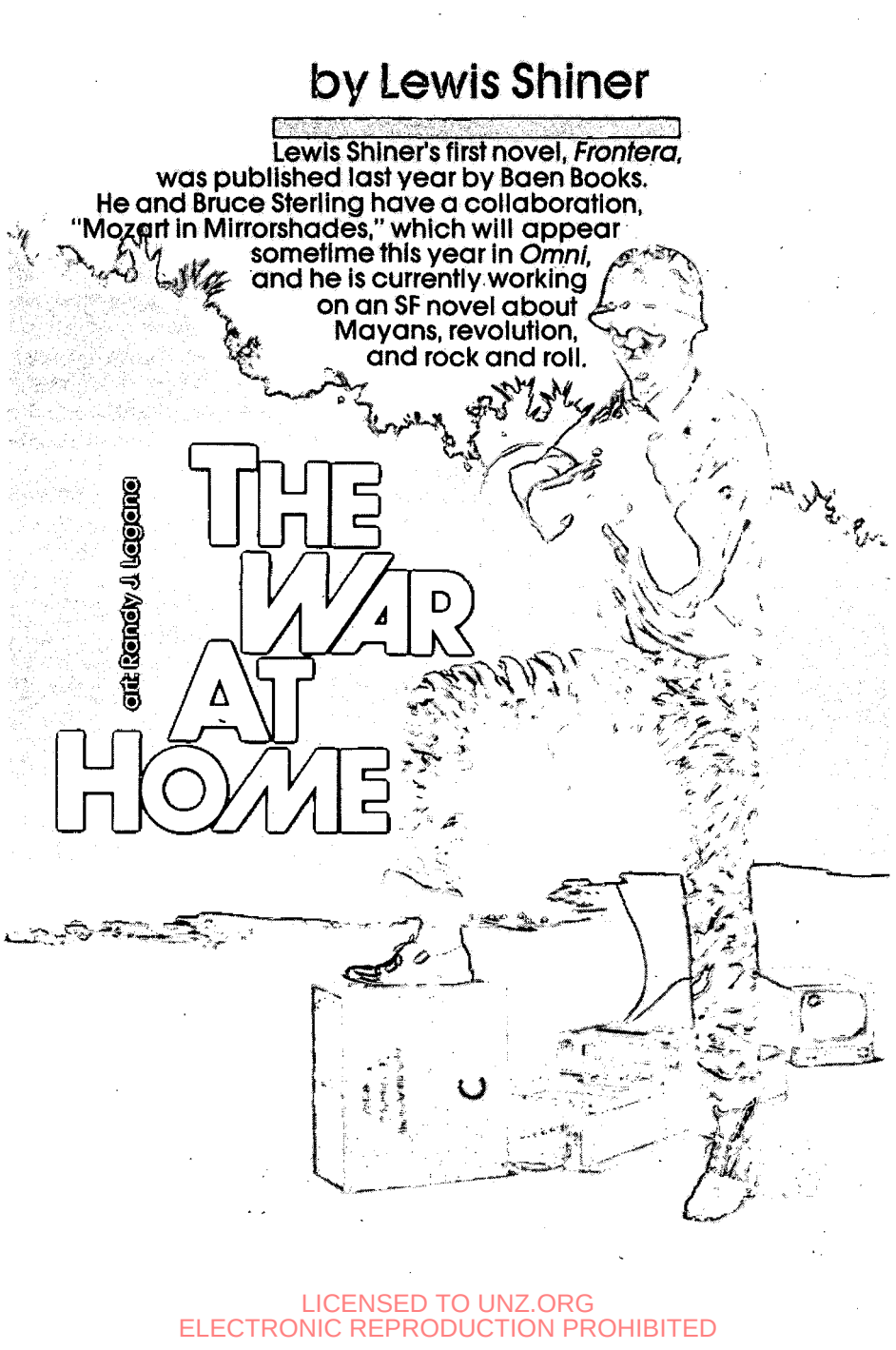
by Lewis Shiner

Lewis Shiner's first novel, *Frontera*, was published last year by Baen Books. He and Bruce Sterling have a collaboration, "Mozart in Mirrorshades," which will appear sometime this year in *Omni*, and he is currently working on an SF novel about Mayans, revolution, and rock and roll.



THE WAR AT HOME

art Randy J Lagano

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Ten of us in the back of a Huey, assholes clenched like fists, C-rations turned to sno-cones in our bellies. Tracers float up at us, swollen, sizzling with orange light, like one dud firecracker after another. Ahead of us the gunships pound Landing Zone Dog with everything they have, flex guns, rockets, and 50-calibers, while the artillery screams overhead and the Air Force A1-Es strafe the clearing into kindling.

We hover over the LZ in the sudden phosphorus dawn of a flare, screaming, "Land, you fucker, land!" while the tracers close in, the shell of the copter ticking like a clock as the thumb-sized rounds go through her, ripping the steel like paper, spattering somebody's brains across the aft bulkhead.

Then falling into the knee-high grass, the air humming with bullets and stinking of swamp ooze and gasoline and human shit and blood. Spinning wildly, my finger jamming down the trigger of the M-16, not caring anymore where the bullets go.

And waking up in my own bed, Clare beside me, shaking me, hissing, "Wake up, wake up for Christ's sake."

I sat up, the taste of it still in my lungs, hands twitching with berserker frenzy. " 'M okay," I mumbled. "Nightmare. I was back in Nam."

"What?"

"Flashback," I said. "The war."

"What are you talking about? You weren't in the war."

I looked at my hands and remembered. It was true. I'd never even been in the Army, never set foot in Vietnam.

Three months earlier we'd been shooting an Eyewitness News series on Vietnamese refugees. His name was Nguyen Ky Duk, former ARVN colonel, now a fry cook at Jack In The Box. "You killed my country," he said. "All of you. Americans, French, Japanese. Like you would kill a dog because you thought it might have, you know, rabies. Just kill it and throw it in a ditch. It was a living thing, and now it is dead."

The afternoon of the massacre we got raw footage over the wire. About a dozen of us crowded the monitor and stared at the shattered windows of the Safeway, the mounds of cartridges, the bloodstains and the puddles of congealing food.

"What was it he said?"

"Something about 'gooks.' 'You're all fucking gooks, just like the others, and now I'll kill you too,' something like that."

"But he wasn't in Nam. They talked to his wife."

"So why'd he do it?"

"He was a gun nut. Black market shit, like that M-16 he had. Camo clothes, the whole nine yards. A nut."

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I walked down the hall, past the lines of potted ferns and bamboo, and bought a Coke from the machine. I could still remember the dream, the feel of the M-16 in my hands, the rage, the fear.

"Like it?" Clare asked. She turned slowly, the loose folds of her black cotton pyjamas fluttering, her face hidden by the conical straw hat.

"No," I said. "I don't know. It makes me feel weird."

"It's fashion," she said. "Fashion's supposed to make you feel weird."

I walked away from her, through the sliding glass door and into the back yard. The grass had grown a foot or more without my noticing, and strange plants had come up between the flowers, suffocating them in sharp fronds and broad green leaves.

"Did you go?"

"No," I said. "I was I-Y. Underweight, if you can believe that." But in fact I was losing weight again, the muscles turning stringy under sallow skin.

"Me either. My dad got a shrink to write me a letter. I did the marches, Washington and all that. But you know something? I feel weird about not going. Kind of guilty, somehow. Even though we shouldn't ever have been there, even though we were burning villages and fragging our own guys. I feel like . . . I don't know. Like I missed something. Something important."

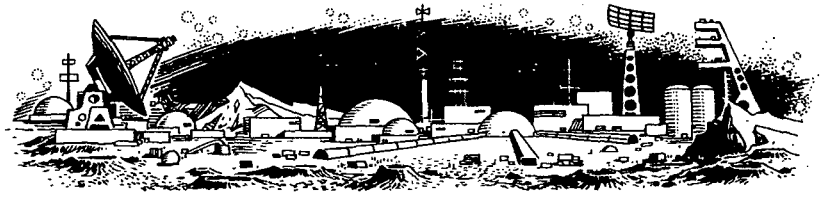
"Maybe not," I said. Through cracked glass I could see the sunset thickening the trees.

"What do you mean?"

I shrugged. I wasn't sure myself. "Maybe it's not too late," I said.

I walk through the haunted streets of my town, sweltering in the January heat. The jungle arches over me; children's voices in the distance chatter in their weird pidgin Vietnamese. The TV station is a crumbling ruin and none of us feel comfortable there any longer. We work now in a thatched hut with a mimeo machine.

The air is humid, fragrant with anticipation. Soon the planes will come and it will begin in earnest. ●



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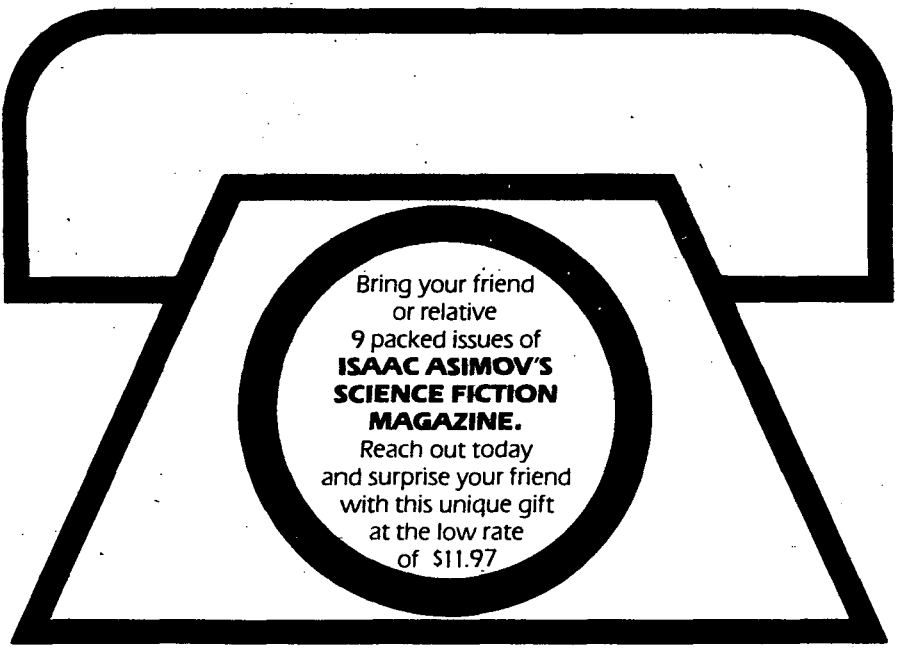

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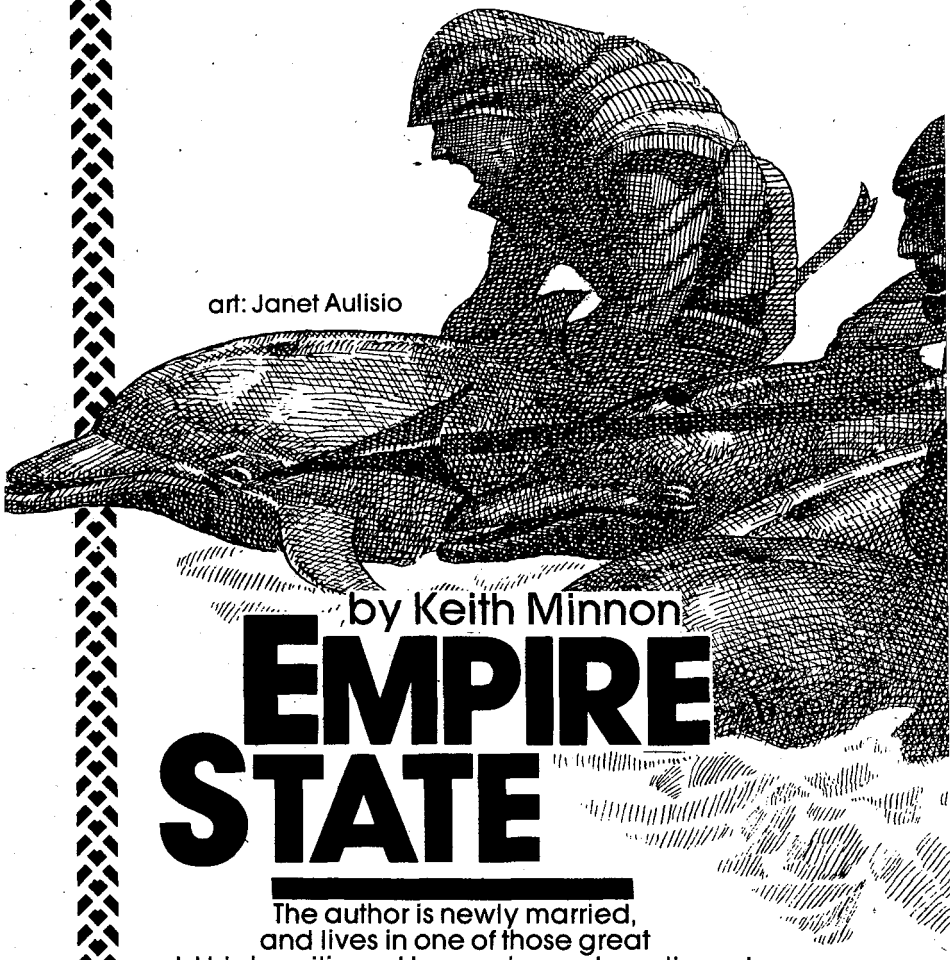

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by Keith Minnon

EMPIRE STATE

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In the year of our Lord 2238 the frigate *Huguenot*, of forty-two guns and over three hundred souls, set forth from the Catskill Archipelago in search of the Empire State. I was a raw thirteen when we sailed, but of good family and certain wealth, so it was my lot (and my privilege) to hold the station of captain's cabin boy and personal yeoman. And though many years have passed between the adventure itself and this, its sorely delinquent chronicle, my memories of both its wonders and its horrors have remained with me, as sharp as the Westchester sea breezes, as fresh as the Stockbridge surf. In keeping with current custom (and a still freshly inked contract) this will not merely be a collection of log entries; even *I* would find that boring. No, this shall be a *story*, a *tale*, the manuscript of which shall be left in the care of Messrs. Dubois and Lefebre of the Lefebre Trading Company, Mohonk, our financial backers who live for the scribbled word, the totaled column, the balanced book. Indulge me, reader. And watch the boy; he may for all the good wide world be *me*.

The sounds and silences of the sailing ship filled the air even as the stars filled the evening sky. Tobe, the boy, leaned out over the frothing, phosphorescent bow wake, his hands fast in the sprit rigging, and listened: to the creaking voices of timber and plank, to the groans of rope and line, the steady rushing of the wind, and below it all, to the constant, hurrying hiss of the sea as the ship cut ponderously through it.

He was less than a shadow, all but invisible against the black and glittering waves. The woman slave and the free seaman, crouching together just forward of the foc'sle, could not see him and therefore spoke freely, if only in rough whispers:

" . . . He'll be on you after quarters for missing that brass and the quedeck teak," said the seaman. "It's the little things that catch Hasbrouck's eye."

"But who is on *him*," the slave named Loundes said, with some heat, "for such a little thing as getting us lost?"

Lost? Tobe's shoulders tightened; his brow creased. They couldn't be lost; not two weeks from last sight of land . . . how could they actually think the ship had lost its way? He held his breath. . . .

"He's the captain," Hawkins, the seaman, said. "He doesn't need anyone knocking *his* head, least of all the likes of you and yours."

Loundes grunted. She said, "Well, I for one am blood puked being kept from knowing what is going on. I may be bound to follow this ship to hell and back, but I still have the right to know the where and the when and the why of it. We all do."

"Slaves or freebooters," Hawkins replied, shrugging, "make no difference to Captain Hasbrouck. We all pull pay every day we sail this god-

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forsaken ship, same as he. The Lefebre Company wants metals, and you can be sure Hasbrouck will do his damnedest to bring them back a hold full. He'll let his wardroom know the details of his plans soon enough, and then the freemen, and then you. He's just waiting for some sign to tell him he's *right*."

"But what if we've left this 'Empire State' of his in our wake already and are now bow-on toward Spain? You've heard the stories; God knows what crawls on *those* shores." She spread her arms wide, embracing the night. "No one has ever been this far out, two weeks from our last landfall, chasing rumors and legends centuries old . . ."

Hawkins looked at her with no little amusement. "What's the use worrying, eh? *Huguenot* was built for such a voyage. No trust in those sails of yours?"

Loundes grunted again, and spat, windward; Tobe caught a little. She turned into the new moonlight now flooding the horizon, and her cheek gleamed like wet silver. "There's a lot of sea beneath us," she said, so quietly Tobe barely heard her. "That's all."

Hawkins only nodded.

Later, with a steaming pot of turned cider in one hand and a basket of sandwiches in the other, Tobe kicked respectfully at Captain Hasbrouck's sea-cabin door. It opened immediately; golden light streamed out; the captain stood silhouetted in it, holding forth his hands, taking the basket from the boy and motioning him in. His was a small cabin, and filled to overflowing with charts, navigational tools and other exotic devices. Still, the captain, small of frame and wiry, seemed lost in it. He looked Tobe up and down with his shrewd blue eyes, and his orange hair, on fire in the lamplight, shook its curls with his quick laughter. "So, lad," he said, "what is it they are whispering tonight?"

"The same, sir," Tobe said, filling a mug. "But this time the slave belonging to Hawkins—Loundes is her name—was complaining that we were lost." He managed to control the question in his voice, but his eyes, he knew, betrayed him.

"Ahh," was all the captain said, however. He took the mug and drank, then gestured with it to the charts at the same moment the ship took an unexpected roll. Cider on the charts, Tobe thought as he grabbed wildly for balance, but nothing spilled. The Captain winked, took another drink, then put the mug down to flatten a chart curl. "We have time for another lesson tonight, I think."

Tobe flushed with quiet excitement, and his eyes jumped to the silver, glass and brass instruments strewn about. Which one would it be? What mysteries would the captain allow him to glimpse, however complex, however incomprehensible, however *wonderful*, this time?

Captain Hasbrouck reached for his sextant. "I think tonight we will

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allay your fears as to whether *Huguenot* is or isn't lost. Here," and he placed the instrument firmly into Tobe's hands, "you remember how to use this, I expect?"

"Yes, sir," Tobe whispered.

The captain laughed and clapped the boy on his back. "We shall make a pilot of you yet, lad, I think. Come, up on deck with you to shoot your stars."

"Can I—?"

"Carry the axe up yourself? Of course, lad." He held the cabin door for Tobe. "A pilot always carries his own tools. Don't forget the log, quill, and ink, now . . ."

Master Whaley, *Huguenot*'s sailing master, was on the bridge. Jumping from the ladder, the captain waved him to his ease. "Keep the deck and the con, Edward," he said. "Tonight I am only an observer."

Master Whaley noticed Tobe then, following the captain off the ladder. "Another lesson for the boy, sir?"

Hasbrouck nodded. "One can never get too much celestial navigation, I think. What stars do you have for us tonight, Edward? We require only three."

Master Whaley duly pointed them out, and Tobe set to his task. He checked each sight and reading several times before he felt comfortable enough to attempt the final set he would use. Captain Hasbrouck watched him in the darkness, smiling slightly.

I wonder, Tobe thought, feeling the captain's eyes on him, does he see himself in me? Does he see the cabin boy he once was, wishing to be a pilot, hoping someday to be commander of his own ship? Tobe redoubled his concentration, determined to be perfect, determined to make the captain proud of him. Someday, he thought, I too shall have a ship. Someday I too will lead great adventures. Someday.

"Soundings are erratic, sir," Master Whaley was saying. "Rough bottom as well; we lost three lines today alone."

"I know." The captain turned to look forward. "We are close, I think," he said.

Tobe's heart skipped, and he almost missed a sighting. He took in a long breath and regripped the sextant.

"You don't need to hear it from me, sir, I'm sure," Whaley said, "but I've noticed a general feeling of uneasiness among the slaves this past week. Ours are an excitable lot, as a rule. And most of them have never sailed beyond sight of land."

"And lucky they are," the captain replied, "to have the opportunity! Damn *squids*; lucky they are to be here at *all*, eh, Edward?"

"To be sure, sir."

"Have you your figures yet, lad?"

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Tobe laid aside his quill. "Yes, sir; I've just noted them down."

"Good. Let's go below and plot them, then."

As he passed the sailing master, Hasbrouck said, "Tomorrow," and Tobe's heart skipped once more. Tomorrow . . .

He found Deb still awake in his rack.

Her eyes, bright in the shuttered lamp he carried, blinked widely. Tobe extinguished the flame and slid in next to her warmth.

"Another lesson?"

He kissed her. "Celestial navigation."

She kissed him back. "Sounds religious."

"It's fun . . . like *this*."

She gasped. "Hey, I'm not ready yet . . ."

Regardless, he slid into her warmth, and covered her protest with another kiss.

Presently, he whispered, "It's tomorrow, I think."

Deb yawned, and snuggled close. "What are you babbling about?"

"The captain told Master Whaley 'tomorrow.' "

"Tomorrow what?"

"Just 'tomorrow.' But I know what he meant."

"And . . .?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Listen, yeoman, I don't hob with the commanding officer of this tub every waking moment, like you; we slaves scrub decks; see?" And she held up hands he couldn't see in the darkness. He grabbed for them anyway, put them around his neck, and they lay together quietly for a moment.

"The Empire State," he said then. "He was talking about the Empire State. We must be arriving tomorrow."

"Let's just say we'd *better* arrive tomorrow. The senior squids have been talking seriously about desertion, you know. Or if not that, maybe even mutiny."

Tobe stifled a laugh. "Mutiny? How?"

"You think they'd tell me? Everybody on *Huguenot* knows who I sleep with."

"They should all be so lucky—"

She punched his arm. "Really, Tobe, I've never heard talk this bad before. The captain should listen to the protests, not brush them aside. We slaves make up nearly a third of the crew, after all."

"But you're . . . they're *squids*!"

She punched him again. "Goodnight, little boy," she hissed, and turned over.

"Hey, wait a—"

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"Doors are closed, Tobe. See you second watch."

Tobe scowled a little, but left her alone. In the dark and pitching night his thoughts turned back to visions of the Empire State . . . and these led him quickly to the stairs of sleep, where his visions just as quickly became dreams . . .

The bells for colors the next evening were still echoing through the passageways when there was a firm rap on Captain Hasbrouck's door.

The captain didn't even look up from his meal. "See who it is, lad," he said, his mouth full.

Tobe opened it a crack and saw three slaves, one female, two male, standing at attention beyond. The increasingly heavy seas that *Huguenot* had been meeting throughout the day caused the two men to lose their balance and grab the bulkhead for support, but the third stepped defiantly forward. Tobe saw then that it was Loundes.

He glanced back. "Sir?"

"For Christ's sake," the captain cried, spraying food, "first this damn storm coming and now *squids*!" He shoved his plate away. "How many, then?"

"Three, sir."

"Well, I only have the stomach for one. Bring her forward and—*damn these seas*!" for at that moment his mug had tipped and spilled hot cider into his crotch.

Loundes was in the cabin before Tobe could stop her, however, and came to attention again in front of the captain's table. Wiping his pants with the tablecloth, Captain Hasbrouck glanced up once, then continued cleaning himself.

The slave, staring, was silent.

"And what is your pleasure tonight?" the captain demanded finally, throwing aside the cloth and bringing both fists down on the table.

The ship rolled and Loundes stumbled, but did not fall; she regained her balance even as the ship did, and said, "I represent the eighty-three servile landsmen and landswomen of *Huguenot*'s crew, and—"

"Sir," Tobe prompted.

"—and I would like to—"

"Of *Huguenot*'s crew, *sir*," Tobe repeated.

The slave flushed; the captain smiled; Tobe grinned behind his hand.

"Very well," Loundes said, "*sir*. As spokeswoman for one third of the crew I have come, *sir*, to ask some important questions."

There was far-away thunder, then, gently tearing the night.

"Well be quick about it," the captain said. "This damned storm will be upon us sooner than I'd feared."

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"First and foremost, *sir*, we want to know when we will reach the Empire State."

Captain Hasbrouck stood, went to the cabin's only hull port, and looked out. "All too soon," he replied, and gestured outside. "Weather permitting, of course."

"With all due respect, *sir*, we've been given evasive answers like that for the past week. I would hate to return to the others with nothing more than that to—"

A blue-white glare momentarily silhouetted the captain against the port glass, then a great peal of thunder sounded, shivering the very timbers of the ship. *Huguenot* took a particularly long and sickening roll at that moment and all three in the cabin lost their footing and ended up in a tangle against the hull bulkhead.

"Madam," Captain Hasbrouck said, extricating himself, "this meeting, however brief, however unfulfilling, must now come to an end. It seems I have a storm that begs my undivided attention. Tobe, escort her below."

"But—" Loundes began again.

"Enough."

The two matched glares for a moment, eye to eye, then Loundes cursed and looked away.

The captain brushed past her. "Tobe," he said over his shoulder as he exited, "the bridge, five minutes," and stumbled headlong into the two slaves still waiting in the passageway. "God *damn* these squids!" he roared, and then was gone.

It took only those scant five minutes for the storm to hit in force. When Tobe emerged topside the rain immediately and completely drenched him; the wind, shrieking, grabbed at him with great and powerful hands, threatening to toss him into the ragged darkness. Tobe shielded his eyes and looked wildly about, and saw the captain at the port rail. He was shouting orders to the seamen and slaves aloft in the rigging as they attempted to clear the remaining canvas.

Tobe struggled through the lashing sheets of rain and frothing sea spray to a secure position at the railing close enough to the captain to hear any order given. Hasbrouck gave him a wink in welcome, spat out a mouthful of seawater and gestured to the heart of the storm.

Tobe looked, but saw the sky and sea in mingled blackness only, at once mere inches, then unaccountable miles, it seemed, from the ship. Then lightning flashed and the sky lifted into rolling, roiling, snakelike cloud banks, and standing against the glare of the lightning bolt Tobe saw a massive island rising sheer from the crashing seas.

"THERE!" the captain cried, above the screaming wind and deafening thunderclap.

Darkness again rushed the ship, drowning it once more, but the light-

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ning's after-image remained before Tobe, burning brightly. "The Empire State," he whispered, his voice charged with sudden incredulous wonder. *The Empire State . . .*

Those of the crew who had missed the sight of it at the previous flash certainly saw it at the next, for now the island was twice as large, twice as tall, twice as ominous . . .

"By God," Tobe heard on the wind, "it's a *building!*"

Another lightning flash, and its thunderclap ripped the air. Now all could see that this "island" before them was indeed a man-made structure, a huge and terribly old building, or at least the topmost portion of one, standing alone against the stormy sea. Hundreds of empty windows gaped at the crew, limned in green slime, before darkness once again plunged the structure into obscurity and deadly proximity.

The captain leaped to the helm. "Hard to port, Master Whaley! Hard over!" Both he and the sailing master put their weight to the wheel, and *Huguenot*, protesting mightily, slowly came about.

The Empire State building moved past with nightmarish slowness, but the ship cleared it with no damage.

"Dear Christ!" the captain shouted then, "there's another!"

It was indeed another wreck of a building, rising up from the furious sea, another obstacle for the ship, however slowly, to dance around. And beyond that building, emerging from the rain like wraiths, were still more buildings . . .

New orders were shouted to the crew in the rigging; more sail was cleared; *Huguenot* came about once more, this time heeling to such a degree that Tobe's only choices were to marry the railing or drop into the black waves. He chose the former.

Taking a wave head-on he swallowed a bellyful of seawater, then promptly heaved both it and his supper. The next wave cleaned his clothes, but not his pride. *Children* do this, he thought wretchedly, little *boys*, not *him*. Still, he vomited again.

Hasbrouck noticed the condition of his seasick yeoman and promptly ordered him below.

"But sir, I—"

"BELOW!"

Tobe went.

Deb, he found, had preceded him. She lay shivering in his rack, thoroughly soaked, and seasick herself. Seeing her condition only made Tobe more disgusted with his own. He flung his clothes under the rack and crawled in with her; they clung together and shared what little warmth the wind and sea had not already robbed from them.

Tobe wanted desperately to share his misery, his shame, but found he

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could not. The shame of disgracing himself in front of the captain was too much to admit to a *woman*; it was enough to leave him silent.

Deb said only, "Can you sleep?"

He found, only after some time, that he finally could.

The news that the Empire State was inhabited spread quickly through the crew. In the clearing dawn mists, tier after tier of soldiers were revealed, as well as other figures crossing spidery bridges between exposed sections of the massive ancient building. The majority of the inhabitants, however, could be seen leaning out of the hundreds of windows overlooking *Huguenot*, apparently as curious as the crew.

At midmorning Tobe saw a boat with six oarsmen round the building's western corner. Captain Hasbrouck saw it too, and climbed to the bridge to watch its approach.

After some minutes the boat stationed itself within hailing distance, and two figures in colorful dress stood, easily riding the swells, and raised hands in greeting.

The captain crossed his arms; the crew, taking the hint, was silent.

"Shall I have a boat lowered to meet them?" Master Whaley asked, after a moment.

Hasbrouck shook his head calmly. "Let's wait," he said.

More minutes passed, and Tobe found himself acutely aware of just how heavy the silence was; the rising tension was almost palpable; he wanted to *do* something, *anything*. . . .

Enough, he told himself then; you have shamed yourself enough for one voyage. Bide; *learn* from this. The captain will know what to do.

After several minutes had gone by one of the persons standing in the boat called out, "Hail!"

The captain leaned out on the railing. "I'm listening!" He bellowed back.

"Will you parley?"

Hasbrouck hesitated, glanced at Master Whaley who shrugged. "Where?" He replied finally.

"At your convenience, sir!"

"Convenience," the captain murmured, smiling slightly. "We'll see." He raised his voice again. "Come ahead!," and turned to Tobe. "Meet the master-at-arms at the accom ladder and have the two of them brought to the wardroom. Tell the jailer I want the rest kept topside. Understood?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then make it so. Master Whaley? You're relieved; I'll need you below. Mr. Walkill? You have the deck." With one final, calculating look to the approaching boat, Captain Hasbrouck left the bridge.

* * *

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Tobe entered the wardroom after knocking. The captain, seated before the stern ports, looked up and winked.

"We have them in the passageway, sir," the boy said.

"Is the master-at-arms with you, lad?"

"Yes, sir."

"Jailer!"

The warrant officer leaned in past the door. "Sir?"

"Stand easy in the p-way, will you? And send in our envoys."

"Yes, sir."

The door opened fully; Tobe stepped out of the way as the representatives from the Empire State swept through. The otherwise utilitarian wardroom was instantly transformed by their gaudy robes and heavy perfumes. Tobe blinked; this was his first real chance to observe them fully; he blinked again, and then realized that his mouth was open.

Both Captain Hasbrouck and Master Whaley rose, their own faces impassive, but Tobe was certain that they too were surprised. Though perhaps 'surprised', he thought, was too mild a word.

Both of the representatives wore heavy, elaborate, painstakingly feminine make-up. Like harlots.

And one of them was even a woman.

Women were forbidden access to the wardroom.

The woman said, "We are agents for the director, sir."

The captain, of course, ignored her. He spoke instead to the man. "My name is Sammaël Hasbrouck, captain of the free ship *Huguenot*, from the island of Mohonk in the Catskill Archipelago. We have come to open a trade route, mutually agreeable to—"

"Captain," the woman interrupted, "I am the representative of the Skyscraper. All initial communications must be with me."

Tobe's mouth dropped open again. She had actually dared to interrupt? And the impertinence!

The captain, however, only frowned. "Must *she* do all the talking?" he asked of the male representative.

The man smiled, and shrugged. "She's my superior," he said.

In a corner now, Tobe cringed; the master-at-arms peeked his head into the compartment again, but Hasbrouck waved him back out. "Take over, Edward," he whispered to the sailing master at his side. "I suddenly have no stomach for this; my next words to these . . . people . . . I will certainly regret."

Master Whaley nodded, his face a perfect mask, and said, "As our captain just mentioned, ma'am, we have come on a mission of peace from an island group to the north and west of your—" He groped momentarily for the term she had used.

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"It's the Skyscraper," the woman said, with no small note of pride. "And the Skyscraper is part of the City."

Master Whaley bowed his head slightly, and continued. "We have come to the Skyscraper in hopes of establishing a mutually profitable trade agreement. We are not an official diplomatic mission, of course, but merely agents for a trading company whose sole purpose is to find—"

"Clients," the woman said. "It is a concept and practice we are familiar with. We trade with many lands, many nations. There is much that we require, but also much that we offer."

"Excellent. Might a delegation of no more than six men be welcome to parley with your leaders, ma'am?"

"Certainly." And the woman smiled. "I will arrange it. Does tomorrow noon suit you?"

Master Whaley turned to the captain. "Sir . . . ?"

"Fine," Hasbrouck said, tightly. "Fine. Our master-at-arms will show you back to your boat. Tobe?" And he gestured stiffly toward the door.

The two envoys rose, then bowed deeply. "It has been a pleasure, sir," the woman said.

Hasbrouck only nodded.

After he had delivered the envoys to the master-at-arms in the passageway and had closed the wardroom door behind him, Tobe could still hear the captain exclaiming, " . . . and open the ports, by God, I'm *gagging* from their stench!"

Deb dropped out of a passing work party and cornered Tobe at the weather deck rail. "They say the captain practically kicked the envoys off the ship," she whispered, glancing around.

Tobe glanced too. "One of them was a *woman*," he whispered back.

Deb whistled. "In the wardroom? So it's *true*," and she grinned broadly.

Over Tobe's shoulder the Empire State building was blue and mute in the afternoon haze. She looked at it for a long moment, her grin lingering. Tobe found he didn't like what he saw in her eyes. "You'd better follow your working party," he said. "I can't bail you out with the mates every time, you know."

Her grin softened, and she touched his cheek gently, then, "See you!" and she was gone.

Tobe turned to look at the building himself. Things must be very different there, he thought. Different, certainly, and maybe dangerously so. A sudden shiver of nervous dread went through him, and he wondered: *what is going to happen next?*

That night he awoke only slightly when Deb left his rack. "Wha—" he said, blinking in the darkness.

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"Shhh, I'm only going to pee," she said, and stepped out into the passageway.

Tobe next awoke to the clamoring of the ship's bell. In the dawn light, swinging to his feet, he realized he was still alone in his rack; Deb, apparently, had never returned.

As he pulled on his clothes a seaman ran by his compartment. "The squids deserted ship last night," he panted, and continued on his way. Impossible, Tobe thought. They'd be crazy to—

"Christ," he muttered, "where the hell is Deb?"

The captain's cabin was empty. Tobe ran next to the bridge, where he found Hasbrouck by the wheel, surrounded by his officers. " . . . but just how many are actually gone?" he was demanding.

The master-at-arms spread his hands. "Fifty at least," he said, "maybe more. It's most of the female slaves and some of the male ones as well. We'll have to muster the lot of them to get an accurate count."

The burly deck officer said, "I can count the bitching squids I have left on one hand." He spat toward the railing. "Better they all went if you were asking me."

"Perhaps, William," Captain Hasbrouck said, "perhaps someday I shall."

Uneasy, lifeless laughter. Then the master-at-arms spoke again. "We know they went over the side within an hour after the four-to-eight watch turnover. No later than five. And they swam rather than wake us all by lowering boats. Still, we had two men on anchor watch, one on stern watch, ten Marines patroling, one duty cook, and two here on the bridge."

"And all of them," broke in the master corpsman, "are in sickbay with bashed skulls. I expect to lose a few by noon."

"So this desertion," the captain said, "was well planned. Obviously. Hell, I slept through it like a baby, as did you all."

"Damn squids," said the deck officer. "Sneaky as cats."

Then the captain noticed Tobe. "Ah, lad, go warn the galley. The wardroom, gentlemen? First a plan, then a full stomach, and then we *act*."

The thunder of several cannon—short and wide, but eloquent—still echoed in Tobe's ears as the whaleboat was lowered into the water. Captain Hasbrouck's parting instructions echoed there as well: "Take copious notes; remember everything; I want to know what they think as much as what they say. I'm counting on you, lad."

Master Whaley, leading the whaleboat crew, favored Tobe with a smile. "Nervous?"

Tobe shook his head importantly, then looked out across the waves to the Empire State building. He gestured to it. "I have a score to settle."

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"Hah. Don't we all."

The coxswain loosed the stern line. "Clear!" he called, and they were away.

With every slow, steady oarsbeat the Empire State loomed. Tobe took in every window, every stone, every rusted girder and metal panel. Never in his brief life among the islands of the Catskills had he seen anything so huge, so ancient, so alien. All of *this* world lay under the sea, buried in the ooze of the past. Yet . . .

Master Whaley ordered the oars pulled in when they reached hailing distance. Hundreds of inhabitants crowded every available vantage point. Tobe, his heart racing, strained to make out individual faces. Where were they?, he thought. Where is *she*?

The sailing master raised his megaphone. "I wish to speak with someone in charge!"

"Green light!" came the reply, floating across the water on a breeze.

"That means 'go,' " said someone from the stern.

"Are you certain, Mr. Hawkins?"

The seaman nodded. "Something my old Dad told me once. Old talk."

Master Whaley raised his megaphone once more. "We will come ahead, then!" And aside, to the boat crew, "Into the jaws, gentlemen, steady as she goes."

They rowed unopposed toward a large, rough maw cut into the side of the building. As they neared it Tobe could hear the echoing crash of the sea swells riding one after the other into the cavernous darkness. Going to their death, he thought. And then: As we are?

Above them, as if in answer, the soldiers of the Empire State manning the lower windows and walls lowered their bows and spears, and sheathed their swords.

After Tobe's eyes became accustomed to the dark of the enclosed harbor he looked about, almost frantic to take it all in. He saw numerous stone buttresses on all sides topped by ledges and balconies of all sizes, and punctuated by shadowed arches leading into the bowels of the building. And on every balcony and ledge, at every archway he saw more people, talking, gesturing, regarding them as though they were little animals caught in a firmly sprung trap.

A gaily dressed group standing at the end of a quay that extended almost to the center of the enclosed harbor raised their arms, and the population quieted. The continued steady rush of the sea through the entrance and against the pilings of the quay was the only sound until Master Whaley spoke.

"We come in peace," he said in a voice loud and clear enough for all to hear.

A woman with long, golden hair replied, "That is most wise, sir."

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Whaley smiled. "Can you tell me the condition of my fellow crewmembers?"

"They are well."

"May I speak with them?"

The woman turned to the others and spoke quietly, then she turned back and shook her head. "It is not possible, sir."

Hawkins grumbled something that Tobe missed, but Master Whaley heard it and silenced him with a look.

"Our captain cannot deal in good faith," he said to the woman, "until the question at hand is resolved. We must have our crewmembers back."

"Your crew came to us freely," the woman said, choosing her words carefully, "just as you have."

"Their act of desertion was unlawful. Surely, madam, you can understand our position."

The group on the quay conferred again, and then the woman said, "We understand your position and we sympathize, if only in principle. We must, however, ask that you understand our position as well. Anyone who comes to us with good intentions from any vessel, from any nation, is welcome in the Skyscraper, or in our sister buildings of the City. The bloodlines must remain clear, and without new citizens it cannot."

Master Whaley made to speak, but the woman continued, "It is our wish that you leave the City. Much can be avoided by your swift and peaceful departure."

"We cannot leave with our questions unanswered. We require a guarantee that our people are alive and well." Master Whaley's voice exposed a sharp edge. "We need to know that it is their wish that we leave, and that they stay."

The woman turned again to her companions. Their conversation was animated, and lasted several minutes. Then the woman said, "We do not condone violence, sir."

"And neither do we," Master Whaley replied immediately.

"We have . . . heard differently."

"You have only heard one side. Allow us to moor and we can both decide what is true and what is not."

The woman gazed at Master Whaley for a long moment. Then she said, "With you they were slaves. Here, they are free. This meeting is ended. I wish you fair seas, sir. Goodbye."

They turned as one and left the quay. Tobe watched them walk through an arch and disappear in the darkness there. Then he looked about, searching again for a familiar face in the crowds around them before turning to the sailing master. "Is it over?" he asked. "Is this all?"

Whaley shook his head, his expression somber. "It is far from over, lad." He also looked about, taking in the hundreds of people still watching

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them from the walls. "Far from over," he said again. Then he looked out to where *Huguenot* rode at anchor, and his eyes blazed. "And the first thing we must do is tell the captain."

"What kind of defenses can they have? Spears? Flaming arrows?" Captain Hasbrouck paced furiously, hands clasped behind his back, his scowling face downcast.

"We saw only bows, spears and swords," Master Whaley said. "And ceremonial ones at that."

"They can't have the powder for cannon, sir," contributed Master Eyck, the gunnery officer. "Catapults, maybe, but no serious firepower. Their limited range will cripple them."

"*We* will cripple them, gunner," the captain said. "We will make them wish we never popped over their cozy little horizon in the first place." He looked out a port to the Empire State, now a respectful distance away, and studied it through squinted eyes.

Tobe, from a corner, spoke up. "Sir?"

Hasbrouck turned. "Yes, lad?"

"You plan to bombard them?"

"I plan to *destroy* them."

"But what about . . . what about the people?"

The captain grinned coldly. "Hopefully we will murder the lot of them, eh, gunner?"

"Yes, sir," replied Eyck. "My boys are primed."

"We'll run port side first with full broadsides from both decks to show them at the outset what *Huguenot* is capable—"

"But sir!" Tobe interrupted, his eyes wide, his mind in turmoil. "Do they have to die? Can't we, can't we—"

The deck officer cuffed him. "Is our little squid losing his nerve *before* the damned battle? Save it, lad, for when a sword aims to shove down your throat. Then you've my permission to crap your pants."

The wardroom erupted in hearty laughter, and Tobe's protests were drowned out. He fled the compartment red-faced and ashamed, but angry as well. He ran until he found himself on the weatherdeck so far forward that the jib rigging snagged him. One more step and the grey ocean crested, ready to swallow him whole with the commonest of ripples.

He couldn't get an image of Deb out of his mind, an image of her cut and bleeding, lying in a tumbled, grotesque heap. And standing over her, laughing as he sheathed his bloody sword, was Captain Hasbrouck . . .

The words rang out again: " . . .We'll make them wish we never came . . . we'll murder the lot of them . . ."

And with that a brand new feeling surfaced within him, a feeling so

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new that he gasped as though struck: "I'll *hate you*!" He screamed into the wind. "I'll hate you *forever*!"

And he knew in his heart that he would.

One hour before sunset, *Huguenot* attacked.

Because of the crew shortage Tobe was assigned to one of the ammo gangs bringing the smooth round stones up from the ballast voids. He had to work furiously to keep pace with the men on either side of him as broadside after broadside thundered from the ship. He didn't have time to think, to despair at what was happening, nor to be angry about it. There was only the stones, and the rhythm, and the death being dealt above.

Huguenot made three passes, successful ones judging from the cheers of the crew manning the cannon. Their jubilance infected the crew below; the ammo gangs began a victory chanty in time with their labor, loud, strong and bawdy. Tobe found himself singing along with the rest, caught in the moment, forgetting in the new, raw thrill of it where the stones he was passing up were being shot, and who lay in their terrible path. *I* am the killer, said his hands as they gripped a stone and passed it on. *I* am the killer, *I* am the killer . . .

His momentary exhilaration turned just as quickly to horror and disgust, but he was caught fast in the rhythm, the breath of death as he fed it, stone by stone. *I* am the killer, *I* am the killer . . .

On the fourth pass someone yelled down, "The cowards are finally returning fire!"

With what, Tobe wondered miserably. He imagined their little spears and arrows slicing into the sea, hopelessly and ludicrously short of their mark. Take a lesson from the *real* killers, you poor people, he thought; look closely and see how it is done . . .

Suddenly he was aware of a different note in the cheering above; cries of concern were beginning to mingle in, then gain in numbers. Then a voice above the rest shrieked, *"They're GODDAMN WHALES!"*

The ship lurched as something massive collided with it. Tobe was flung off his feet and sent sprawling into a ladder well. Several others piled in after him, cursing, thrashing about; Tobe could smell their fear, and he crouched at the bottom of the well until they extricated themselves. This has to stop, he thought, his anger feeding on panic and blossoming into rage. This is madness, madness . . .

When he saw his opportunity to get out himself he took it, running up through the confused, shouting crowds of ammo handlers to find the source of the madness; he went to find his captain.

He found instead a weatherdeck awash with soldiers of the Empire

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State. They all wore scarlet, and they swung huge curved swords. The ship's Marines met them blade to blade, and blood flew as freely as rain.

Tobe grabbed a barrel cover for a shield and ran aft. "This has to stop!" he yelled through the din of battle. "This has to stop!" He saw the sea full of pilot whales and dolphins; some were saddled and harnessed; indeed, there were still soldiers riding in, leaping from their mounts and swarming up the side of the ship to reinforce the soldiers already on board.

More than once the barrel cover took a shove or a sword blow, but Tobe, perhaps because he was young, perhaps because he held no weapon, or perhaps simply because he ducked and dodged at all the proper moments, made it alive to the aft topdeck where, shielded by his personal marine guard, Captain Hasbrouck was about to dispatch one of the scarlet soldiers lying at his feet.

"Ah, lad!" Hasbrouck motioned him into the relative safety behind the marine. "Come watch a slave die!"

Tobe looked down and saw that the soldier was Loundes, the deserter.

"I could have killed you in your sleep, captain," she said, defiant even in defeat. "I could have cut your balls off, but I didn't."

Hasbrouck pointed his sword at her belly, at Seaman Hawkins' brand there. "For that possibility, bitch," he said, "I grant you a clean thrust." And he ran her through. "But nothing more." He pulled his blade free, and blood cascaded from her mouth. She jerked twice, then was still.

"Make a note, lad," the captain said, "to buy Hawkins another when we return home."

With a cry of uncontrollable fury Tobe flung himself at Hasbrouck, striking at him, kicking, scratching and screaming. Taken completely by surprise, Hasbrouck fell back to the stern railing, his sword caught between them. Just as the Marine began to react the two tumbled over the railing and into the shadow of the air between the ship and the sea. And before they hit the water Tobe grasped the swordblade in both hands and thrust it up under his captain's chin, burying it in his brain.

"There!" he cried, *"there!"* as he tumbled into the sea. *There* . . . as the cool bitter water enveloped him . . . you bastard . . . and finally, as he lost consciousness . . . oh God, what have I done? . . .

The blinding white light that he saw when he first opened his eyes took several moments to resolve itself into a window. The view through it came next: of a clear morning sky over a calm blue sea . . . and of a three-masted frigate riding at anchor, swinging with the current. After several more moments he realized it was *Huguenot.*

"Tobe?"

He turned his eyes away from the brightness and focused them on a

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person seated beside his bed. "Deb . . . " he whispered, the word grating on a sore, raw throat.

She leaned over him, put her hand to his forehead, then touched his cheek with her lips.

"Where are we?" He asked. "Where—?"

"In the Empire State, only they call it the Skyscraper here. One of the Sea Riders fished you out of the water and brought you to safety. How do you feel?"

"Tired," he said, "very tired. And sore." His palms, too, were throbbing, and itching terribly. He raised his hands only with effort, and found that both of them were bandaged.

"They say you were cut deeply, probably by grabbing a sword. Do you remember?"

Tobe did, then, in a rush of memories, and a soft groan escaped his lips. "I . . . killed someone."

Deb's eyes widened. "Who? One of the soldiers?"

He shook his head. She really didn't know. And if she didn't, perhaps no one did. Perhaps any witnesses were as dead as . . . *he* was. Could this be justice? He wondered. "It doesn't matter," he said. "The battle . . . it's over?"

She nodded. "You've been bedridden for nearly a week; your fever only broke last night. Tobe, I thought you were going to die, too . . . I thought I was going to lose you."

He looked at her. "Then why did you go, that night?"

She hung her head.

He touched her arm with a bandaged hand. "Who is dead?"

Looking up again, but not at him, she wiped a streak of tears away. "All of the marines; they fought to the last man, as usual. And nearly half of the remaining crew, including the captain, though his body was never found. And Loundes—"

"I know; I saw her die."

"Bravely?"

"Yes, and quickly. But what of Master Whaley?"

"Alive. I saw him only yesterday, at the conclusion of the negotiations. He commands *Huguenot* now."

"There is peace, then?"

She nodded. "The ship departs soon. You . . . are to go back with them."

Tobe knew that that was how it must be. A tear of his own welled up, hesitated, but in the end did not fall. "When?"

Deb rose. "When you say you are strong enough. When you feel up to it." She ran her hand through his hair. "You rest, now. You'll need all of your strength . . ."

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At the door she suddenly turned back. "You don't have to go back with them, you know. You can stay if you want to."

He shook his head slowly. "I have to go, Deb. That part of me hasn't changed, even after all of this. You could come back too, if you want."

She managed a shadow of a smile. "I'm not as brave as Loundes," she said.

He smiled too. "Oh, yes you are."

"Something," she said, "keeps telling me that we will be together, somehow, sometime." She opened the door. "I will probably wait for you, Tobe," she said, and then closed the door behind her.

On either side of the ship the sea parted, and the mottled backs of two sperm whales breached. From the bridge Tobe heard them spit and gasp, and their plumes hung in the air like smoke.

"Our escorts," Master Whaley murmured.

Tobe said nothing.

It was a grey day, and the sea was the color of slate, meeting the sky blurrily in veils of mist and fog. In their wake the Empire State was already lost to view.

The sailing master looked at the boy. "You have done a little growing up on this voyage," he said.

"A bit," Tobe agreed bitterly.

Master Whaley nodded slowly. "I think," he said then, "we should be frank with one another. Ever since your return you have been wearing your feelings on your sleeve. That can be a very dangerous thing to do, these days."

Tobe glanced up. "What do you mean?"

The sailing master drew him close, and whispered, "Listen to me; if nothing else, hear this: hate him if you need to; hate him with everything that is in you, but never let anyone see your hatred; never let anyone else know." He winked solemnly. "If you let it show here, now, you can count the days till you are a meal for the trailing sharks, and believe me, no one will notice you are gone."

Tobe hesitated, then said, "Do you hate him, Master Whaley?"

"Ahh." The sailing master stood away from the railing. "That would be telling." He put his hand on Tobe's shoulder. "Now off with you. Scrub that look from your face and *mourn your captain*. He is the hero of this godforsaken adventure, after all."

He winked again, and Tobe, after a moment, winked back.

It was a long, a very long, voyage home.

My hand is now cramped, reader, my pile of paper used, and my pot

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of ink nearly dry. This story, no—this prologue to the true story yet to be, is now complete. My mind is clear; I am, I think, ready.

My yeoman promises fair winds tomorrow. She is young and eager to please; she treats me with bemused, yet I suspect genuine, respect. She will make a fine captain someday.

Of her respect I only hope I am worthy, for on the morning tide we sail for the Empire State.

Aye, reader; old Captain Hasbrouck has lain rotting in his sea grave these past twenty years, with his legends and his prejudices gone with him. Times have changed, and I am captain now.

"I will probably wait for you," Deb said.

I only pray she has. ●

MARTIN GARDNER (from page 19)

SOLUTION TO CATCH THE BEM

The Evenoder will never catch the monster unless it first alters the game's parity. If a mathematical structure has two distinct states, one of which can be identified with even numbers, the other with odd numbers, the two states are said to be of opposite parity. In number theory, for example, all even numbers have the same parity, and all odd numbers have opposite parity. Some of the most famous proofs in number theory, such as a proof that the square root of 2 is irrational, are based on parity considerations.

In our game, the two states are distinguished as follows: If the Evenoder, when it is his turn to move, is separated from the BEM by an even number of blocks—assuming he moves directly toward the

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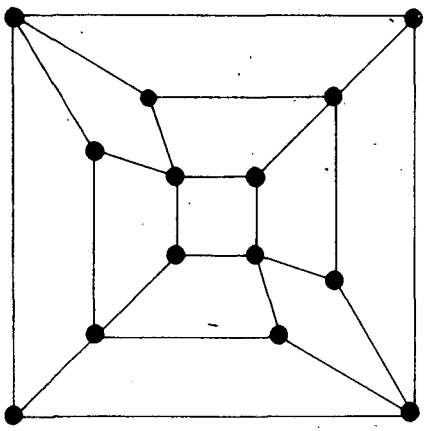
monster—the position has an even parity. If he is separated by an odd number of blocks, the position has odd parity.

The Evenoder cannot catch the BEM as long as the game's initial parity is "conserved"—that is, as long as he has an even number of blocks to go if he moves directly toward the dime. If he can alter the parity, he can easily trap the BEM in one of the three right-angle corners.

There is only one way to alter the parity. He must head directly for the triangular block in the upper left corner and circle it. Once he does this, the BEM is easy to capture.

14 Towns on Evenod



Parity considerations such as this arise in many board games. In checkers and chess, for instance, especially near the end of a game, a position's parity may determine who wins or loses. In particle physics, parity is identified with right and left mirror images. In 1957 two Chinese physicists were given the Nobel Prize for discovering that in certain particle interactions mirror-reflection parity is not conserved.

Here is another problem based on parity. The illustration shows a network of roads connecting 14 towns on Evenod. Is it possible to start at one town and follow a path that visits each town once and only once? In graph theory such a path is called a Hamiltonian path. (If such a path closes at the ends it is called a Hamiltonian circuit.) There is a delightfully simple way, using a "parity check," to prove that the network has no Hamiltonian path.

The proof is given on page 111.

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AFTER THE DAYS OF DEAD EYE-'DEE

by Pat Cadigan

art Daniel Horne

Pat Cadigan lives in Overland Park, Kansas with her husband Arnie Fenner. During the day, she works at Hallmark Cards, where she serves as editor of freelance submissions and also writes and edits three lines of humorous cards. Her short fiction has sold to such markets as *Omni*, *F&SF*, *New Dimensions*, and *Shadows*, and she is making great strides with her novel-in-progress, *Captives*.

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The third night Brett was gone, Merridee put out all the downstairs lights and waited at the window by the kitchen table, the shotgun loaded and ready. She'd left all the upstairs lights burning; the glow they threw down let her see the backyard pretty well, considering. At fifty-eight, her eyesight wasn't as dependable as it had once been—thus, the shotgun and not the rifle. You didn't have to be a crackshot with a shotgun, though at one time she'd been handy with either weapon. Dead-Eye 'Dee, her brothers had called her back in her target shooting days. They should have seen old Dead-Eye 'Dee now, she thought, crouched on a chair in a dark kitchen with a shotgun, waiting for God-knew-what.

A hundred yards beyond the house, she could just make out the silhouette of the stand of trees near the well Brett had sunk twenty years ago, only to have it dry up a year later. That was where it came out of, those trees. Maybe it was actually holed up in the old well. If it were, she couldn't imagine how it was getting out. She shifted position on the chair and carefully set the shotgun on the table. A moth hurled itself against the screen and fluttered away, up toward the light. Awfully late in the year for moths, Merridee thought idly; maybe it wouldn't come tonight. Maybe it had wandered off or died or something.

There was a rustle of leaves; a small puff of chill October air came through the window. Merridee blinked, adjusting her glasses. Uh-huh, she thought. Dead leaves danced across the yard as the shadow detached itself from the stand of trees and approached the house. Would it think she was upstairs (if it thought at all)? Or could it sense her waiting in the dark?

The thing moved awkwardly, as though it were used to much different terrain. She could see it a lot better from the kitchen window than from upstairs, where she'd watched it the previous two nights. She hadn't been able to tell much about it at all, not even whether it was worth creeping downstairs to phone the sheriff about. But tonight she'd get a good look at it, see if it were man or beast, and then she'd know what to do. Maybe.

Just out of the range of light, it stopped and she thought she saw it hunker over, as though examining the ground. It was man-sized but she could tell the limbs were all wrong, the one arm she could make out was too long even for an ape. Maybe it was some poor freak, simple-minded as well as deformed, looking for shelter and food.

It made a strange sound and she jumped slightly, putting one hand on the shotgun. It wasn't a very fierce noise, something between a sigh and a growl, or maybe a sigh and a snore. Not very animal-sounding, but not human, either.

She peered through the screen, wanting to call to it just to make it step into the light. It sigh-growled again and shuffled along the grass and dead leaves, stopping when it was opposite the window.

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It knew she was there. The thought gave her a sudden flash of panic. An image of Brett popped into her head. He knew she was here, too, here in the house alone while he was days away, fishing and hunting in Oklahoma with his friends. His friends knew where she was, too, and his friends' wives, and her son and daughter-in-law; they all knew. But none of them knew the way this thing knew. The thoughts chased each other around in spirals in her mind as panic passed, leaving behind a rationally cold fear.

She picked up the shotgun. Weeks ago, she had hinted to Brett she'd have enjoyed a camping trip. It had been a long time since they'd taken one together. He'd only reminded her of the rheumatism in her shoulders and knees, that she'd just be in pain the whole time. So he was gone with his friends now and she was safely at home, no rheumatism acting up, watching this shadow. She wished she were anywhere else. Then this thing, whatever it was, could have had the run of the whole place and she wouldn't have had to know about it, she wouldn't have been trapped in the kitchen, wondering if she should shoot it.

It didn't move again for a long time. Because it could see in the dark, she thought, and it was looking her over. She imagined how she must look to it, wide-eyed behind her glasses, her loose, broad face homely with old lady worry, a shotgun in her thick hands like a rolling-pin. Not much as a damsel in distress. Somewhere in the back of her mind was the irrational idea that every bit of her life had been pointing toward this moment and whatever happened afterwards would be mere time-keeping till the grave.

She untensed the tiniest bit, her fear smoothing into puzzlement. All right, now what did the thing want? Was it going to attack or not? Should she phone the sheriff and let him come take care of it? Puzzlement mixed with impatience. Suppose she just walked out there, walked right out there and said *What do you want?* as bold as you please? With the shotgun, of course. Would that goad it into doing something? Anything was better than this cowering in the dark.

The notion of going out to it blossomed suddenly into a powerful urge. Yes, she would go out to it, get a good look, confront it. It certainly wasn't going to come in for examination. She thought of Brett sound asleep in the camper. He might think to call her and he might not. It wouldn't enter his head that anything could possibly happen to dull old dependable Merridee securely at home. She was always securely at home as far as he was concerned, him and everyone else. Except that thing, waiting for her in the dark.

Maybe, she thought as she slid quietly off the chair, it just wanted some food and she should throw it some stale bread.

Hunger. That idea took her as strongly as the notion to go outside. She

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paused with her hand on the deadbolt. *Hunger.* One-handed, she fumbled a loaf of that tasteless white stuff Brett was so partial to out of the breadbox on the counter, the shotgun seesawing in the crook of her other arm. Maybe it wouldn't like the stuff. No; rubbish, she thought. If it were hungry enough, it would eat anything.

She opened the door slowly and poked the screen door with the shotgun. Well, she couldn't fool it into thinking she was upstairs any more, she thought. But deep down, she knew she hadn't fooled it at all. *Go out. Hunger.* She wavered a little before she stepped over the threshold and let the screen door flap shut behind her.

The thing shuffled along in the grass and leaves again. Her coming out hadn't stampeded it; the knowledge made her feel satisfied and bold. She stood up a little straighter as she hurled the bread in the thing's general direction. The package landed just inside the lighted area where it lay like litter thrown from some out-of-towner's car.

Go on; take it, you blamed thing, it's for you. She wanted to say it out loud but the words stuck in her throat. She heard the hesitant rustling of grass and leaves; the trees on the north side of the house seemed to echo it. Leaves swirled down between herself and the thing. Its shadow stood out a little more clearly to her now and yes, it was all wrong for any man or beast.

It approached the bread with excruciating slowness, like an old fox coming upon a baited trap. Maybe she should have taken the bread out of the bag, Merridee thought. There was a sound like a grunt and she heard something slither along the ground. A lump appeared in the dead leaves beside the bread. Then fingers, big and thick, much thicker than her own or Brett's or anyone else's, broke through and clutched the package. Big, thick fingers the color of a thunderhead about to let go, and only three of them, only three big, thick, blue-grey fingers. Merridee stared owlishly, unable to holler or run, the shotgun a meaningless weight in her hands. In some part of her mind, she was screaming her head off but it was so far removed it might as well have been someone else.

One of the all-wrong fingers pierced the plastic and tore into the bread, shredding it. And then . . . she blinked, her eyes watering madly. Something else strange, as though the arm belonging to those fingers had telescoped as the body came closer. Then the arm showed in the light and she saw it was exactly that way, not jointed but extendable, exactly like a telescope.

Without warning, it thrust its face into the light. Merridee stepped back, bringing one hand up defensively, the shotgun forgotten. At last she found voice enough to gasp; screaming was beyond her. The face hung over the package of bread, refusing to go away. *Come out. Hunger.*

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She hadn't had it quite right. It had wanted her to come out and it was hungry, but not for bread.

Merridee fled into the house.

She woke just after dawn, lying on top of the bed fully clothed with the shotgun beside her, the stock resting on Brett's pillow. For a moment she stared at it, not remembering. Then she sat up quickly, looking around the bedroom. *The thing*— Well, it wasn't in here with her unless it was hiding in the closet. The closet door was wide open, exposing thirty-four years' accumulation of clothes and personal belongings. No room for a *thing* in there. She flashed back to her childhood, a million years ago it felt like, the days of monsters in closets. Not her, but her brothers, Charlie and David. Her mother had always been soothing their nighttime terrors, turning on the lights, showing them there was nothing in the closet but the most mundane items of clothing and shoes, while she lay in her own room listening, not a bit afraid. There had never been monsters in the dark for Merridee Dunham. Nor for Merridee Percy, married to Brett and living in this house for 500,000 years, nor for their one child, who was more of Brett than of herself.

She rubbed her hands over her face, feeling as unwashed and weary as a hobo. It was hard to believe in the thing in the daylight, the same way it had been hard to believe in her brothers' closet monsters. Now she could only vaguely remember the face it had shown her; she remembered her fear and she remembered running from it. But she remembered nothing after that.

Well, obviously, she'd been so tired from staying up that late she'd gone right to bed without even bothering to undress, just like some old man (*Brett;* who else) who's spent all day and half the night in a duck blind.

She looked at the shotgun lying on Brett's side of the bed. If that wasn't the silliest thing in the world and dangerous besides, sleeping with a shotgun. She left it there while she went to wash.

Later, sitting at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee and two pieces of sourdough toast, she looked out the window at the stand of trees. All the leaves had blown off them now; the bare branches clawed at the sky in the wind. She tried to imagine how it would look, that creature coming through the trees and shuffling toward the house. It was like trying to picture the shirts and coats in her brothers' closet congealing into a monster. She couldn't do it. Shaking her head, she smiled to herself. Like two different worlds people lived in, one filled with strange, inexplicable shadows, one utterly prosaic, and she had never doubted once in her million years long life that she existed in the latter.

As she was getting up to refill her coffee cup, she caught sight of the

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spot where she had thrown the bread. It was gone; not even a shred of the plastic wrapper remained. Squirrels, she thought. And birds, the tough little sparrows who hopped through the bitter snows. And the wind had blown away whatever had been left behind.

In the early afternoon, she bundled herself up in two sweaters and one of Brett's old hunting jackets and went for a walk. The phone had not rung all day and she was tired of waiting for a call that probably wouldn't come. The house was clean—the house was always clean—and there was nothing that needed doing urgently. Brett could recaulk the windows and put up plastic himself after he came back. He was expecting her to do it while he was gone, she knew, but she didn't feel like it. Let him grumble over it. She would just tell him: *I didn't feel like doing it.* What would he make of that? She didn't know and didn't care. *I'm apathetic but who cares,* she thought, and giggled, still tickled at the old joke.

She walked the quarter mile down the dirt drive to the mailbox. The October wind tore at her hair and made her eyes water behind her glasses. She took the glasses off and tucked them into her jacket pocket. There wasn't much to look at. It was very pretty country but she'd seen it and seen it. Seen it for a million years.

The mailbox leaned forward over the paved road as though it might have been watching for oncoming traffic, of which there was very little on any given day. The mailman had left only one envelope, a brown and green announcement that she, Mrs. Merridee Percy, had another chance to enter the biggest sweepstakes of the year. A quarter-mile hike for a piece of junk mail. But she didn't begrudge the time or effort. She put her glasses back on and examined the brightly colored enclosures on the walk back. A $100,000 dream house, a yacht, a brand-new Lincoln-Continental (she could just picture it destroying its suspension on the dirt drive), a full-length mink, a home entertainment system with a big screen TV and a record player that took funny-looking little records—compact discs, the brochure called them—a video-recorder and lots of other things. Any of them might be hers already. There was also a sheet of little stamps offering cut-rate subscriptions to magazines. No purchase was necessary to enter this wonderful sweepstakes but she examined the stamps anyway. Maybe she might order a magazine or two, something that had articles on foreign places or one of those science magazines if they had one that wasn't too technical to understand. Brett had given her the *Ladies' Home Journal* once, years before, but she'd found little in it to pique her curiosity. She'd already been living in the *Ladies' Home Journal* for a quarter of a million years by then.

She reached the house, paused, and then walked around back. The trip to the mailbox had not been sufficient to relieve her cooped-up feeling.

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The sweepstakes announcement was crammed into a pocket. She kept her hand on it while she approached the stand of trees. She wasn't looking for the creature, she told herself, absolutely not. It was getting harder and harder to believe in it as the day wore on. But if anything unlikely did pop out at her from somewhere, she'd pull the sweepstakes announcement out and throw the brochures right in its face. *All right,* she'd say, *you tell me how you can be real in a world that has sweepstakes and cut-rate magazine subscriptions!* Well, it wouldn't be able to, that was all there was to it, and the thing would just melt away into thin air, and that would be the end of the matter. A $100,000 dream house didn't come with monsters in the closets. Reality would take care of any old thing better than a shotgun would.

She found the package of bread lying torn up on the boards Brett had nailed down over the dried-up well. Some of it had been nibbled at. *Squirrels,* she thought firmly. And birds. Squirrels and birds for certain and apparently they didn't like that bland white stuff any better than she did. And monsters didn't eat Wonder Bread, whether they lived in closets or dried-up wells.

She left the enclosure describing the $100,000 dream house crumpled up next to the bread and walked back to her own house.

When evening came, she went upstairs to the bedroom and looked at the shotgun still lying on the bed.

"Slept all day, did you?" she said aloud and laughed at the absurdity of the statement and the sound of her own voice. She'd hardly ever spoken out loud in an empty house; unlike some people, she wasn't in the habit of talking to herself, never had been. Oh, when that Brett called—*if* he called—she'd give him what her grandfather had called Billy Blue Hill. *You go off shooting up half of Oklahoma and what happens to your stay-at-home wife but she becomes a babbling idiot, talking to shotguns and sundry. And seeing shadows in the back yard.*

She cradled the shotgun in her arms. Not thinking, not feeling anything at all, she took it downstairs to the kitchen and stood it against the wall next to the table while she made supper.

She ate staring at the barrel. *No,* she imagined herself saying to someone who didn't know anything about how people lived (and she couldn't think who that might be), *no, we generally don't eat supper with our shotguns handy, or sleep with them either. It's just a funny kind of thing I'm doing here and I don't know what for.*

A funny kind of thing. Come to think of it, there was lots of room in her life for funny kinds of things. She could set down her spoon, get up, walk around to the shotgun, pick it up and blow a hole right through any one of the four walls, or all of them. She could shoot up the whole

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house and dance naked in the ruins until Brett came home, if she wanted to. Or she could run upstairs, pack a bag and take off to see the world. She could fling her plate of pork and beans on the floor and roll around in the mess singing; she could phone the fire department and say there was a brush fire raging out of control behind the house; she could start the fire herself and not phone anyone. She could have done anything that came into her head no matter how foolish or malign, and there were plenty of peope whose lives were so crowded up with such things that there was barely room for the things they hadn't done yet. But her life was spacious enough to accommodate a Sears-sized catalogue of antics. Even in the days of Dead-Eye 'Dee, there'd been plenty of latitude and a look down the coming longitude would have shown nothing but the traditional, famed, proverbial and inescapable straight-and-narrow.

I see, said the imaginary person she had been relating all this to. She froze, bent over her plate. A tingle crept along her scalp from neck to crown. She had forgotten this imaginary person, the one who didn't know anything about how people lived. She had done with that stray notion but here it was hanging on in her head as though she didn't know her own mind.

She turned her head to the window; it was closed and she saw only her own reflection against the night. Her reflection nodded at her slowly, with great certainty.

She didn't hurry. She scraped the rest of the pork and beans into the garbage pail and washed the bowl thoroughly, leaving it to drain in the dishrack. Then she slipped on the two sweaters and the jacket, taking time to adjust the rumples and pull the sleeves down. The shotgun—well, of course, she would take it. She found extra shells in the utility drawer and put them in the empty pocket in the jacket.

Light? She went upstairs and put all the lights on again but she didn't turn off the kitchen light. There was no more bread to offer it except her own sourdough and she wasn't going to give it that—that was the good stuff. Tonight she'd fling the rest of the contest brochures at it if it got too active. Maybe then it would get the hint. And if it didn't, there was the shotgun.

Prepared, she stood in the middle of the kitchen and counted to thirty before she picked up the shotgun and went outside.

There was the smell of coming rain or snow in the chill air and the wind had picked up. Merridee walked forward a few steps, her feet crunching on the newest layer of dead leaves. She'd just keep going until there was some sign that she should stop.

The sign came as a feeling of pressure high on her chest, as if the wind pushing against her had suddenly become deep water. All right, she'd stop. She hefted the shotgun impatiently, wanting to get this whatever

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it was going to be over with, just as if she didn't have what amounted to all the time in the world.

She could practically feel all that time all around her, stretching away from her in every direction, past, present and future. Far, far away, almost too far to see was Dead-Eye 'Dee, still shooting and hitting nearly every bull's-eye. You could only see her from behind; maybe she'd known even then there were no targets to shoot at ahead of her. After Dead-Eye 'Dee there was a big patch of present, forty years of Now, one day almost interchangeable with any before or behind it. And then an area that rose up unseeable into the dark, into the night sky for all she knew, but if it had been steps, she would have liked to climb them.

And if she did climb them, what might she find? Nothing so prosaic as, say, a $100,000 castle in the air or heaven. No, something else, something *really* else, that couldn't be weighed or measured by the standards of white bread or shotguns or sweepstakes. There would be closet monsters and strange, inexplicable moving shadows and ideas you'd have liked to have in your head to do if you could even have conceived of them, and things—

and things that moved in an atmosphere neither air nor water but something in between. They didn't eat anything like pork and beans or sourdough; they didn't eat. They were consumed themselves by something that might have been food in the real world of shotguns and somehow they emerged not just whole but more than they had been before, and they didn't take notions to do this or that, notions took them and they found themselves in this notion or that one. It was a world where they did not dream; the world dreamed them and lived through them as instruments. And as instruments, their limbs bent in odd angles and directions, and their joints telescoped—

And their faces. She looked at its face now without fear, without anything. Their faces were an asymmetrical arrangement on an oval of puckered openings, none of which were eyes and at the top a large irregular dark pad crisscrossed with tiny lines, like a picture in a science book of human skin enlarged a hundred times to show detail. It would be sensitive, that pad, like sight and smell and taste and touch and hearing all run together and enlarged a hundred times as well, and the size and shape of the patch would determine what the creature it belonged to was like—

"I see," Merridee said, even though there was no need to speak out loud. But she wanted to tell it the same thing it had told her. She lowered the shotgun, resting the stock on the ground.

The thing bowed its head, aiming the dark pad at her and its arm telescoped out, sliding through the grass and leaves until the three-fingered hand lay within six feet of her. The thing crouched and its arm

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telescoped inward, dragging the creature's body closer to her. The pressure against her chest increased.

Poor thing, she thought. It was hungry for its home. And where it touched her mind, it let her know that she was right. Yes, hungry to be home and it was going home soon.

Going home with her help.

Merridee's nerves gave a jump and she wasn't sure she had understood it that time. But it prodded her gently in her mind again (she still didn't think to wonder how it could do that) and she knew she had understood. Going home with her help. She would take it home.

"Me?" she whispered. "I can do that?"

Yes. She could.

She put a hand to her mouth. It was too— All her life— Nothing ever— The thoughts came and went in flashes. She looked back at the house (half a million years of nothing and he couldn't even find heart enough to take you on a camping trip, leave you behind with the rest of the furniture) and back at her life (Dead-Eye 'Dee shooting bull's-eyes with her back to the future because she knew nothing would come to a girl who didn't even get monsters in her closets) and back at her world (where sweepstakes announcements came solely to show her what other people would be having, to show her that everyone knew exactly where she was, securely at home, at her correct address) and then she turned back to the creature with her eyes tearing in the cold October wind, a million years of life with all that room in it falling away from her old lady body like a worn-out skin. Yes, yes, she would take it home and gladly, if she had to carry it on her back, she would take it home if the effort tore her into a milion bloody pieces. She would take it home. Yes.

No.

The negation in her mind was strong and deep enough to make her reel. She caught herself, leaning on the shotgun until the dizziness passed. The thing shimmered in her watery vision. Panting a little, she wiped her eyes and leaned toward the creature with pained confusion. "No?" she whispered. "But I thought—I thought you—" She remembered the thickened medium it lived in, the way its nourishment consumed it (what a bad time it would have had trying to get bread to eat it rather than vice versa); she remembered all the wonderful strangeness it had showed her and thought a question mark at the end. *I thought you wanted me to take you home?*

Its home receded in her mind and was replaced by the house behind her.

"What?" she asked and even as she spoke, the answer was forming. The dark pad, touched to her open mouth. She tasted something thick. The all-wrong limbs collapsed, the body shrank in on itself, the head

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going down like a deflating balloon. Gone home, at home in her and in her house and her world, where they would stay together, its own world only in their joint memory. She would remember what it remembered, know the things it knew. But she would remain in the house, waiting for Brett, and it would be home.

"Going home . . . to me? In me?" she said, incredulous.

The image of her open mouth pressed to the pad flashed in her brain again. No pain. No fear. No difference.

"You son of a bitch." She raised the shotgun and pulled the trigger.

The explosion seemed to echo for hours. She wasn't used to the noise of a shotgun; it had been years. The shotgun had bucked in her hands but Dead-Eye 'Dee had always been able to stand up to any kind of recoil. She waited until the ringing in her ears began to fade before she walked over to examine the thing.

She had literally blown it to pieces. There was hardly a fragment larger than the palm of her hand, except for its arm, which had still been extended. It lay like a forgotten pole in the leaves, the fingers limp and boneless. There wasn't blood, just a kind of syrupy jelly glistening on the dead leaves. She had a crazy urge to scoop the jelly up and touch it to her mouth, but the urge died quickly.

Even as she watched, the pieces of the thing were melting. Like snow. She poked one of the fragments with the barrel of the shotgun and made a face at the slime it left on the metal.

Here it had come creeping around the house, peering into her mind, showing her things, showing her all those wonderful things, touching her, making her feel different and letting her believe it would take her away, take her out of the house of white bread and Brett and sweepstakes—and all it wanted was for her to stay right where she was, knowing what was out there and not being allowed to go to any of it. Just like Brett and everybody else.

"You son of a bitch," she said again. "To hell with you." She kicked some leaves over the remains and turned back toward the house. The sight of the hand, melting like all the rest of it, stopped her for a moment. Then she walked on, hoping it had known at the end just what it was like to have a last chance snatched away from it.

It melted away completely during the night in spite of the cold temperatures. There was no trace of it at all in the morning, not even in the frost. ●

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(from page 99)

SECOND SOLUTION TO CATCH THE BEM

The towns on the map fall into two parity sets: those with four roads joined to them, and those with three. Figure 1 shows all the even towns circled. Observe that every path from an even town leads to an odd town, and vice versa. Therefore any path on the network must alternate odd and even towns.

Along a path the number of even towns must equal the number of odd towns (the two end towns will be of *opposite* parity), or there will be an additional town of one set (the two end towns will have the *same* parity).

Count the number of towns of each parity. Eight are odd, and six are even. The difference is more than one. It is not possible, therefore, for a path to visit each town just once. There will always be at least one town that is not on the path.

As Figure 2 shows, the network is combinatorially the same as the skeleton of a simple convex polyhedron called a rhombic dodecahedron, a form often taken by crystals of garnet. H.S.M. Coxeter, a famous University of Toronto geometer, was the first to find the above proof that the skeleton has no Hamiltonian path. It is the simplest known polyhedron of this type. So far as I know, no one has yet proved that no polyhedron with fewer than 14 vertices has a skeleton on which no Hamiltonian path exists.

Even and Odd Towns

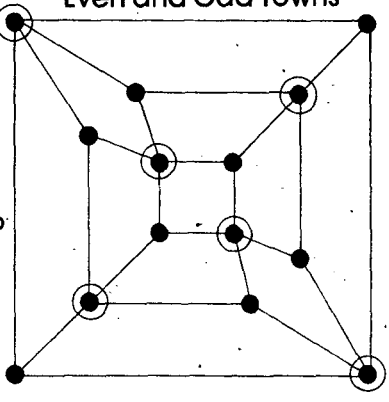

Figure 1

Rhombic Dodecahedron

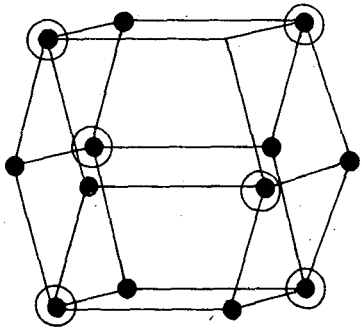

Figure 2

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PRELIMINARY NOTES ON THE JANG

by Lisa Goldstein

art: George Thompson

Lisa Goldstein, a 1984 finalist for the John W. Campbell award for best new writer, returns to our pages with a tale of an exotic people in an ordinary land.

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Simon stood in front of the door, panting a little from the climb up three flights of stairs, wondering if he had come to the right place. He checked the piece of paper in his hand again—3460C, the same as the address painted in cracking numbers over the peephole. The sound of an instrument—a sitar?—could be heard faintly through the door and the hallway smelled like ginger. Why would his advisor want to live here? He shrugged and knocked. There didn't seem to be any bell.

The door opened—the sound of the instrument grew louder—and a man with an enormous black moustache stood in front of him. "Yes?" the man said. A threadbare Oriental rug lay on the floor of the hallway behind him.

"I—I'm sorry," Simon said, stepping back. The man was standing too close, he felt his space being violated. "I have the wrong—That is, I'm looking for—I don't suppose Dr. Glass lives here."

"No, no doctors here," the man said. He wore loose green trousers and a yellow tunic. Simon couldn't place his accent. "You are sick?" He studied Simon intensely from under jet-black eyebrows. Eyes and eyebrows were the same color.

"No, he's not—not a medical doctor—" Simon said. "Never mind. Thanks anyway."

"No one here but my family," the man said. "We celebrate. My wife, my second wife, her husband, my cousins and their children, my wife's cousin, you have no word for it in English. . . ."

Simon had started to draw kinship diagrams in his mind. The smell of spices was making him a little dizzy. He thought he could hear feet stamping beyond the hallway, bells shaking. His second wife's *husband*?

"Where—Where are you from?" Simon said, unable not to ask. He had probably transgressed somehow, broken some taboo, at the very least irritated his informant. His informant? Who was he kidding? But his textbooks had never mentioned how to deal with a situation like this.

"We are the Jang," the man said. He bowed courteously and began to close the door. "Good day." Simon turned away, aware that he had been dismissed. His mind was humming by the time he reached the street.

"Dr. Glass!" Simon said, running into his advisor's office.

"Hello, Simon," Dr. Glass said, looking up from his desk. "You missed a good party Saturday."

"I—Listen, I tried to find it, I ended up in this place—"

"Place?" Dr. Glass said. "Sit down, I've never seen you so excited. What do you mean?"

"I went to your house," Simon said. He fished out the scrap of paper from his pocket. "Here—3460, right? Only the guy who answered the door—"

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"Twenty-four sixty," Dr. Glass said.

"What?"

"You went to the wrong place," Dr. Glass said. "You missed a great party."

"Oh," Simon said. "Well, listen. This guy who answered the door—he was foreign, right?—he said he was—his people were—the Jang. And then I went to the anthro library, and I did some research, and, well, I couldn't find them. Anywhere. And so I thought—So I'm going to do my thesis on them." He was out of breath when he finished.

Dr. Glass watched with amusement, one eyebrow lifted. For the past year Simon had led discussion groups and graded papers and kept office hours and done research when it was required and not done much of anything else. He had been a graduate student for four years, time enough to find a thesis topic and move on. Only nothing seemed to interest him—everything was either boring or had already been researched to death. Some days he had just given up and gone to the beach.

"How do you know this is what you want to work on?" Dr. Glass said. "What do you know about these people anyway?"

Simon sighed, running his hand through his already unruly hair. "Well, their kinship system—their kinship system is incredibly complex," he said. The door to the office opened and he looked up, grateful for the interruption.

"Hello, Dr. Glass," Linda said, coming in. Linda was another of Dr. Glass's students. "Hello, Simon. You missed a great party Saturday."

"I know," Simon said.

"All right," Dr. Glass said. "Write up some notes and bring them to me. I'll let you know what I think."

Simon stood again in front of the door of 3460, a briefcase in his hand and a tape recorder draped over his shoulder. His heart pounded loudly as he knocked. The same man—he looked to be about fifty, Simon thought, athletic for his age—opened the door. This time the hallway smelled strongly of garlic.

"Yes?" the man said. "You find your doctor?"

Simon was surprised the man remembered. "Look, I'd like to ask you a favor. I'd like to—to ask you a few questions. You and your family."

The man was unperturbed. "You are a cop, yes?" he said.

"No!" Simon said. "No, I'm—I'm a student. From UCLA. The university." He brought out his wallet and showed the man his registration card.

"Very nice," the man said drily. "And if you were a cop you would have one of these cards also, yes?"

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"No, listen," Simon said. "I'm a student. I study different cultures, people. I'd like to know more about you. About the Jang."

The man hesitated, then seemed to come to a decision. "All right," he said. "Come in. But we don't talk about our criminal pasts, all right?" In the dim light of the hallway he seemed to wink.

The room the man led him into had no furniture except four or five fat pillows arranged in a half circle. Rugs covered the old wood floor and hung from the walls, their colors mostly dark red, black or yellow. Portraits and yellow photographs of dark people stood over the fireplace and candles in glass cups were placed in front of them. Simon could smell cooking coming from another part of the apartment.

The man sat on one of the pillows and took out a pipe from his trousers. Simon sat next to him, sinking into the pillow with difficulty. He moved to turn his tape recorder on but the man stopped him with an upraised hand. "No," he said. "Not that. We think it steals our souls."

"Okay," Simon said. He took a pen and notebook out of his briefcase and wrote *Recorder steals souls*. "To begin with, what is your name?"

"What is yours?" the man said.

Simon blinked. "What?" he said.

"A custom among the Jang," the man said. "The stranger among us gives us his name first."

"Oh," Simon said. "Simon Montclair."

"I am called Mustafa," the man said. He bowed a little, from the waist.

"And your last name?" Simon said.

Mustafa shrugged. "What is a good last name in your country?" he said. "Smith. I am called Mustafa Smith."

Simon looked up sharply but Mustafa had not smiled. "And the rest of your family—are they called Smith as well?"

"If you like," Mustafa said.

"But you—what do you call yourselves?"

"Oh, you know," Mustafa said. "This and that. It depends on the country."

"Well, then what—" Simon began.

Mustafa said, interrupting him, "I will introduce you to the rest of the family. Would you like?"

"Of course," Simon said. Mustafa clapped his hands. Immediately the room seemed full of people. "My second wife, Francesca. And her husband, Tibor. And these are my cousins, these her brothers." Simon soon stopped trying to make sense of the names. "And my daughter, Clara."

Simon was looking at a young woman with long black hair and deep black eyes and skin that looked like silk. She wore an embroidered blouse and a flowing red skirt, and chains of coins fell from her earlobes. "Hello," Simon said weakly.

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"Hello," she said.

There was an awkward silence. Then Simon recalled his purpose and took up his pen and notebook once more. "Your names," he said. "They're from different parts of the world, aren't they? I mean how—"

"We take the names of the country we are born in," Mustafa said. He dismissed the family with a wave of his hand. Simon watched Clara as she left the room.

"But where are you from?" Simon asked. "I mean originally."

Mustafa shrugged. "Who knows?" he said. "We are from all over. The Jang are from every country on earth. There are Chinese Jang and New Guinea Jang. We are the travelers."

The session was a long one, and very satisfying for Simon. He made three charts of kinship before he got it right and saw Mustafa nodding in approval. These people seemed to marry whenever and wherever they liked: once Mustafa surprised Simon by mentioning his wife in Spain. Simon learned that Mustafa had been a horse trader, a carpenter, a guitar player. He learned that the festival he had interrupted last week celebrated the birth of a saint and lasted three days, that Mustafa believed the king of Hungary could cure any illness, that white was the color of mourning and red the color of marriage.

At the end of the session, after they had agreed to meet every week, Mustafa said, "You go home and tell the police now, yes?" This time Simon definitely saw him wink.

"I'm going home and writing all this up," Simon said.

"Ah," Mustafa said. "And then what will you do with it?"

"I'm writing a—a dissertation," Simon said. "When I'm finished I'll be able to graduate. To leave school. Finally."

"And then?" Mustafa said. "What will you do?"

"Get a job," Simon said. He shrugged. "Probably teach somewhere."

"So this dissertation," Mustafa said thoughtfully. "It is important to you, yes?"

"Oh, yeah," Simon said fervently. "Listen, you guys saved my life."

Mustafa drew on his pipe and leaned back on the pillows, looking satisfied.

"Hi, Linda," Simon said, coming into Dr. Glass's office. "Where's Glass?"

Linda shrugged. "Don't know," she said. "I've been waiting an hour."

Simon looked at papers on Dr. Glass's desk, walked to the window and looked out. "I hear you've found a thesis topic," Linda said.

"Oh, yeah," Simon said. He laughed. "Finally." He turned to face her.

"Sounds exciting," Linda said. "Imagine stumbling on a tribe here in

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Los Angeles." Linda was going to the Australian outback in the summer. "What are they—gypsies?"

"No," Simon said. His caution about revealing his information fought with his need to tell someone and lost. "They call themselves the Jang. Means the People, of course. They know the gypsies, they've traveled with them, but they don't consider the gypsies part of the People."

"That's great," Linda said. "I wonder why no one's ever heard of them. You couldn't find anything in the library?"

Simon shook his head.

"What does Dr. Glass say?" Linda said. "Hey, it's too bad you missed his party Saturday. It was lots of fun."

"I know," Simon said. "And it doesn't look good for me to miss my advisor's party. I got lost."

"Don't worry," Linda said. "There'll be another one."

"I still don't know where the man lives," Simon said.

"Well, next time I'll show you," Linda said. "We can go together."

"Okay," Simon said. Linda smiled at him and he realized that somehow the idea of the two of them going to a party together had turned into a date in her eyes. What have I gotten myself into? he thought. She wasn't bad looking, shoulder-length brown hair, face too thin, chin maybe a little too pointed. Unbidden, the face of Clara rose in his mind.

"Listen, I'm tired of waiting," Linda said. "Do you want to go to Westwood for a cup of coffee?"

"Sure," Simon said.

Once at the coffee shop it seemed the most natural thing for Simon to offer to pay for the coffee and for Linda to accept. Mating rituals of North American peoples, Simon thought. But when he took out his wallet he found he had no money. He remembered getting twenty dollars from an automatic teller just that morning, and remembered too Mustafa's face, eyes gleaming, white teeth showing in a smile.

"You stole from me," Simon said.

"What?" Mustafa said. He lit his pipe and offered it to Simon.

Simon refused, too angry to care about the significance of the ritual. "Listen, you people stole from me. When I got here last week I had twenty dollars. And when I left it was gone. I don't like that. There has to be trust between us, Mustafa."

Surprisingly, Mustafa laughed, showing clean white teeth. "Of course," he said. "And I will tell you what it is. We had to learn if you were from the cops, yes? And so Luis, my first wife's cousin's boy, looked in your wallet. It is hard work, stealing a man's wallet and then replacing it so that he suspects nothing. And so Luis probably thought he deserved

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something for his trouble. That's the way it is in your country, is it not, hard work is rewarded?"

"Yes, and stealing money is rewarded by jail," Simon said, still angry.

Mustafa laughed again. "But now," he said. "We know now that you are not from the cops, we know that we can trust you. Surely that was worth twenty dollars?"

Despite himself Simon began to laugh too. What was twenty dollars, after all? Hundreds of ethnologists paid their informants. And now, as Mustafa said, these people knew they could trust him. He would just keep a closer watch on his wallet from now on.

"I will tell you what," Mustafa said. "In exchange for the twenty dollars I will read your palm. All right? All right!"

Bemused, carried away by Mustafa's enthusiasm, Simon held out his palm. "Ah!" Mustafa said. "I see—I see a woman. Hair to her shoulders, blonde hair or brown. A beautiful woman." Linda? Simon thought. He would have never called Linda beautiful. "You know her, yes? She will be important to you, very important. I see you leaving school, you and her together. You are finished with school. And you are ready to start a new life." Mustafa looked up. "That is all I can see today," he said. "Is it helpful to you?"

Simon shrugged. "I don't know," he said.

"Maybe it will be helpful later," Mustafa said. "And maybe I can be helpful today. Today is a feast day. And you, since you are now worthy of trust and not a cop, are invited along. We celebrate."

"A feast day?" Simon said, beginning to get excited, not quite believing his luck. "For what?"

"Our saint," Mustafa said. "Ana, the mother of all the Jang. It is her birthday today." He offered his pipe to Simon and this time Simon took it. "You will stay for dinner, of course."

Simon coughed. "I'd be honored," he said, wiping his eyes. He followed Mustafa into the dining room.

Simon tried to take notes during the meal but his pen and notebook got in the way and he gave up. Everything was delicious. "What is this?" he asked, having noticed that the Jang talked with their mouths full.

"Hedgehog," someone said, one of the brothers or cousins or husbands.

Simon nearly stopped eating. And yet it was good. Everything was good. He took a second helping and washed it down with wine.

Everyone was talking loudly. Simon thought he heard bells again, and someone dancing, but when he looked around all he saw were the people at the table. The room was growing dim, the candleflames spiraling up to the ceiling. His notebook fell off his lap to the floor and he realized he had dozed off for a minute. Clara's face shone across the table and he smiled at her.

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Then it seemed as if they had gone outside and into brightly-painted caravans smelling of hay. The horses (Horses? Simon thought. In Los Angeles? But he was too tired to look outside.) brought them to a grassy field surrounded by tall trees standing like sentinels. A stream splashed somewhere in the distance. The men got out their guitars and began to play. Men and women danced, feet stamping. Bells jangled.

The full moon was rising. In the empty space above the meadow the sky looked like a banner filled with stars. Simon looked from the moon to Clara's face and to the moon again. I should be taking notes, he thought, and struggled to rise. "Hush," Clara said. "Rest. Everything is all right." He trusted her voice. The music wove through his dreams.

He woke the next day in his room, though he did not remember coming home. He groaned and rolled over. The notebook lay open beside his bed. "Preliminary Notes on the Jang," the notebook said in his handwriting.

He sat up carefully. His head seemed heavy, about to fall off. There were pages and pages of notes, most of them illegible, citing almost every anthropologist he had studied or heard of. "Trickster god—see Amer. Indian myth," one of the notes said. Then a scrawl, then "Mercea Eliade," then a page and a half of scrawls, and then what looked like "cf. Jim Henson's muppets." He squinted, hoping the words would say something else, but they stayed the same.

Pieces of the night before were coming back to him. He remembered dreaming, remembered that they had all dreamed, that they had all had the same dream. It was the dream of the tribe's origins, how Ana, mother of the Jang, had disobeyed her mother the moon and was sent out to wander the world forever.

His headache was gone. He was trembling with excitement now. *They had all had the same dream.* What had he discovered? This was bigger than he had thought. He would be the next Carlos Casteneda, legend of the UCLA anthro department. Best sellers, lecture tours, his paper on "The Collective Unconscious of the Jang" considered seminal in the field. . . . He dressed slowly, organizing his notes in his mind.

He dreamed of the feast in the meadow nearly every night that week. Clara was there, bending over him in the moonlight, kissing him. Sometimes it was Linda instead of Clara, and then he would wake dissatisfied, feeling that something had been taken from him. He began to avoid Linda, stopping by Dr. Glass's office only when he knew Linda would not be there. He visited Dr. Glass every day now, excited, hardly able to wait for the next session with Mustafa, but he said nothing about the feast night. He wanted to save that for later.

Clara, not Mustafa, answered his knock at the next session. "Where—where's your father?" Simon said.

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"I don't know," Clara said.

"I was supposed to meet him today," Simon said, a little impatient. "At—" He looked at his watch. "At three o'clock."

Clara laughed. "And you expected him to be here?" she said. "You don't know much about the way we figure time."

"Well," Simon said. "Can I wait for him? Or could you—would you answer some questions?" He wouldn't mind getting to know Clara better. And her answers would give him insight into the customs of the women of the tribe.

Clara shrugged. "All right," she said.

"Great," Simon said. She led him into the room with pillows and sat down.

Simon sat and took out his notebook. "To begin with—" he said.

"Why don't you use a tape recorder?" Clara asked.

"I—" Simon stopped, confused. "Your father told me you think it steals your souls."

"He told you that?" Clara said.

"Here," Simon said, showing her the page in the notebook as if that would prove something. Was she laughing at him? "My first entry. 'Recorder steals souls.' You mean he wasn't telling me the truth?"

Clara leaned back in the pillows. "Everything we say is a lie," she said. Simon sat upright and started to say something, but she wasn't finished. "Our native tongue is quite different from yours. Everything we say must be translated, put in sounds foreign to us. What would be pure truth in my language comes out muddy and unclear in yours. We cannot help but lie, you see. We are exiles, and all exiles lie."

What was she telling him? How many of his notes were wrong? He chose a question at random. "Why did your father tell me the recorder would steal his soul?"

"I don't know," Clara said. "You'd have to take that up with him."

Simon paged nervously through his notes. "Trickster god—see Amer. Indian myth," he read. He wondered what he had gotten himself into. "Where did you learn to speak English?" he asked, to gain time. "You speak very well."

"I was at the university," Clara said. She tucked her legs inside her long skirt. "Same as you."

"The university?" Simon asked. Clara looked at him impassively. "I—well, I'm surprised. It doesn't seem like the Jang would send their children to the university. Especially the daughters."

"Why not?" Clara said. Simon winced a little under her even gaze. "It's the daughters, the women, who have to make a living, after all."

"You do?"

"Well, of course," Clara said. "The men's status depends on how well

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their women support them. The more money his wives make, the more prestige the man has. Men aren't expected to work."

"They aren't?" Simon asked. He was aware he sounded stupid, unprofessional. "But Mustafa told me—" He looked through his notes. "Mustafa was a horse trader, a carpenter, a guitar player."

Clara laughed. "He plays the guitar, certainly," she said. Then, aware that something more was being asked of her, she said, "I don't know why he told you that. You'd have to ask him."

The session went a little better after that. Clara told him about burial customs, superstitions, the organization of the tribe. Toward the end Simon put away his notebook and they talked a little about UCLA. Clara had even had a beginning anthropology class with Dr. Glass and she did an excellent imitation of him raising one eyebrow and looking out at his students. Simon was so charmed by her he forgot to ask about the dreams, about what really happened in the meadow the night of the feast of Ana. He wondered how he could ask about courtship rituals without offending her.

Finally he looked at his watch. "It's getting late," he said. "I've got to go. Listen, when I come back next week could we pick up where we left off? I've still got a few questions to ask you."

"Sure," Clara said. "I don't see why not." She walked him to the door. "Good night," she said, and added a phrase in her language. She had told him it meant "Luck travel with you."

Simon stopped at a fast food place on the way home and got a burger. Then he went straight to his room to look through his notes. He felt as if he were glowing, as if people on the street could see him radiate light. His thesis was turning out far better than he'd expected and he'd met a dark exotic woman who seemed to like him. Maybe that's why I got interested in anthropology, he thought, remembering whole afternoons spent looking through his parents' copies of *National Geographic*. I wanted to meet dark exotic women.

A half an hour later he had to stop, aware that something was wrong. Mustafa had told him the Jang believed in an afterlife but Clara had mentioned reincarnation. Mustafa had said the Jang didn't eat beef but Clara had given him a recipe with beef in it. Mustafa had told him about a long and beautiful wedding ceremony but Clara had said two people were considered married if they'd simply shared a meal and a bed.

Could there be two sets of customs, one for men and one for women? No, not with this much disparity between them. His agitation grew the more he compared Clara's and Mustafa's sessions. He knew he couldn't wait until next week. Angry now and a little frightened, he got into his car and drove to Mustafa's apartment.

He could hear voices raised in argument as he climbed the stairs. A

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man and a woman were shouting in the Jang's dark rolling language, exchanging insults like thunder. Simon hesitated a little before the door, but his anger overcame everything else and he knocked loudly.

The argument stopped in mid-sentence. Mustafa opened the door, his face flushed, his eyebrows lowered. Clara stood behind him in the hallway.

Simon had never seen Mustafa so angry. It terrified him, made him want to turn around and leave. Then he remembered his thesis, his future, and summoned up the courage to stay. "You lied to me," he said to Mustafa.

"Did we?" Mustafa said. His voice was dangerously low.

"Your information is totally different from Clara's," Simon said. "It's like two different cultures. One of you lied."

Abruptly Mustafa's expression changed. "Well, come in," he said. "Our guests do not stand out in the hall. Perhaps we can discuss this, yes?"

Simon followed them into the room with the pillows. A fire was lit in the fireplace and candles glowed in front of the dark portraits on the mantelpiece. Clara sat down and looked at her nails, almost bored. She would not look at him.

"We would not like to mislead you," Mustafa said. "This thing you write, it is very important to you, yes?"

Simon nodded, still too angry to speak.

"Well then, perhaps we can come to an agreement," Mustafa said genially. "Is it worth, say, a thousand dollars? A thousand dollars for the correct information, for the truth about the Jang?"

"What?" Simon said weakly. He felt as if he'd been hit. He looked at Clara for reassurance but she did not look up. At least, he thought, she has the decency to be embarrassed.

"Come now, a thousand dollars," Mustafa said. "That's not so much. And then your future is secure, you have a teaching job, you are all set."

"Don't be ridiculous," Simon said. "I don't have a thousand dollars. And anyway I don't have to do my thesis on the Jang. There are millions of topics, millions of cultures."

"Yes, but are you willing to spend another four years waiting for one of them?" Mustafa said. How did he know that? Simon thought. "Another four years at the university, waiting for a topic of interest? Come, we will be reasonable. Eight hundred dollars. In a few months it will be time for the Jang to travel again, maybe to cross the water. Think of your notes, your work, all wasted. We can finish our sessions before we leave, and then you can teach, you can settle down, you can marry Linda—"

"Marry Linda?" Simon said, shocked. "Why?"

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For the first time Simon saw Mustafa look confused. "Why? You are in love with her," Mustafa said. He sounded uncertain.

Simon laughed. He felt as if he were pressing his advantage, but he had no idea what his advantage was. "What gives you that idea?"

"Because of the dreams," Clara said suddenly. Mustafa said something to her in the language of the Jang but she ignored him. "Because of the dreams we gave you."

"You gave me dreams?" Simon said. "Those dreams about Linda? And about Clara?"

Clara looked at Simon for the first time. He found it impossible to translate her expression. Surprise? Gratitude?

"You—you dreamed about Clara?" Mustafa said. It was easy to recognize Mustafa's expression, not so easy to find an explanation for it. It was defeat.

"Yes, I did," Simon said. "Now will someone please tell me what's going on?"

Mustafa was silent. "We are the Jang," Clara said finally. "We worship Ahitot, son of the moon, brother of Ana, our brother. The trickster god, you would call him. He tells us to defy authority and to aid lovers. He teaches us to dream together, and we dream the stories of the tribe. Like the story of Ana, that you dreamed with us. And he tells us to aid lovers. We were to help you and Linda."

"Me and—and Linda?" Simon said. "But what gave you the idea we were lovers?"

"Ahitot told us in our dreams," Clara said. "But then you met me. My father wanted to meet you. He called you and you came to learn about us. My father wanted to make money." She looked at her father accusingly, as if to say, You see where your scheming gets you?

"Your father—called me?" Simon asked.

"Yes," Clara said. "That is another thing Ahitot has taught us to do. We can change reality by our dreams."

This was too much. This was worse than the conflicting information he had been given earlier. They were laughing at him, mocking him. "You can stop it now," he said. "I give up, all right? I'm going home. I'm not going to listen to any more. This is crazy."

"You do not believe me?" Clara said. Once again she looked at him impassively, incapable of being contradicted. Her eyes shone in the firelight. "Who do you think it was who changed the address on your piece of paper so that you would come here and not to your advisor's? It changed because we dreamed it."

Simon could not move. He felt he was being called upon to assimilate too much, to believe too many impossible things at once. Mustafa spoke

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into the silence. "My daughter would like to share a meal with you," he said.

Clara looked at her father, horrified. He had wanted to embarrass her, that much was clear, but Simon understood nothing else of what was happening. "A meal and a bed," Mustafa said, clarifying.

Had Clara told him the truth about the significance of sharing a meal and a bed? "You want—you want to marry me?" he asked, and as he asked it it did not seem so absurd.

Clara looked into the fire. "That is what we were arguing about, my father and I, when you came," she said. "It is rare—very rare—for a Jang to marry someone from outside the tribe."

Simon thought of the wild music, the dancing in the moonlight. He thought of his years as a graduate student, four years of sterility, with more to come. Clara was asking him to live with the Jang, to share their dreams, travel to far countries with them and become involved in the weave of the tribe in a way impossible for any anthropologist. He walked over to the fireplace and looked at Mustafa. "I'm sorry if it disturbs you, sir," Simon said. The blaze consumed his notebook. "But I would like very much to accept your daughter's offer." ●

THE DREAMING MACHINE ACQUIRES LEGS

For movement,
for visitations.
For traveling to the heart
of the matter, where voices
reside, where light
is free and plentiful,
where it not only dreams
of the other
but enters there.
For dancing.
For running away.

—Steve Rasnic Tem

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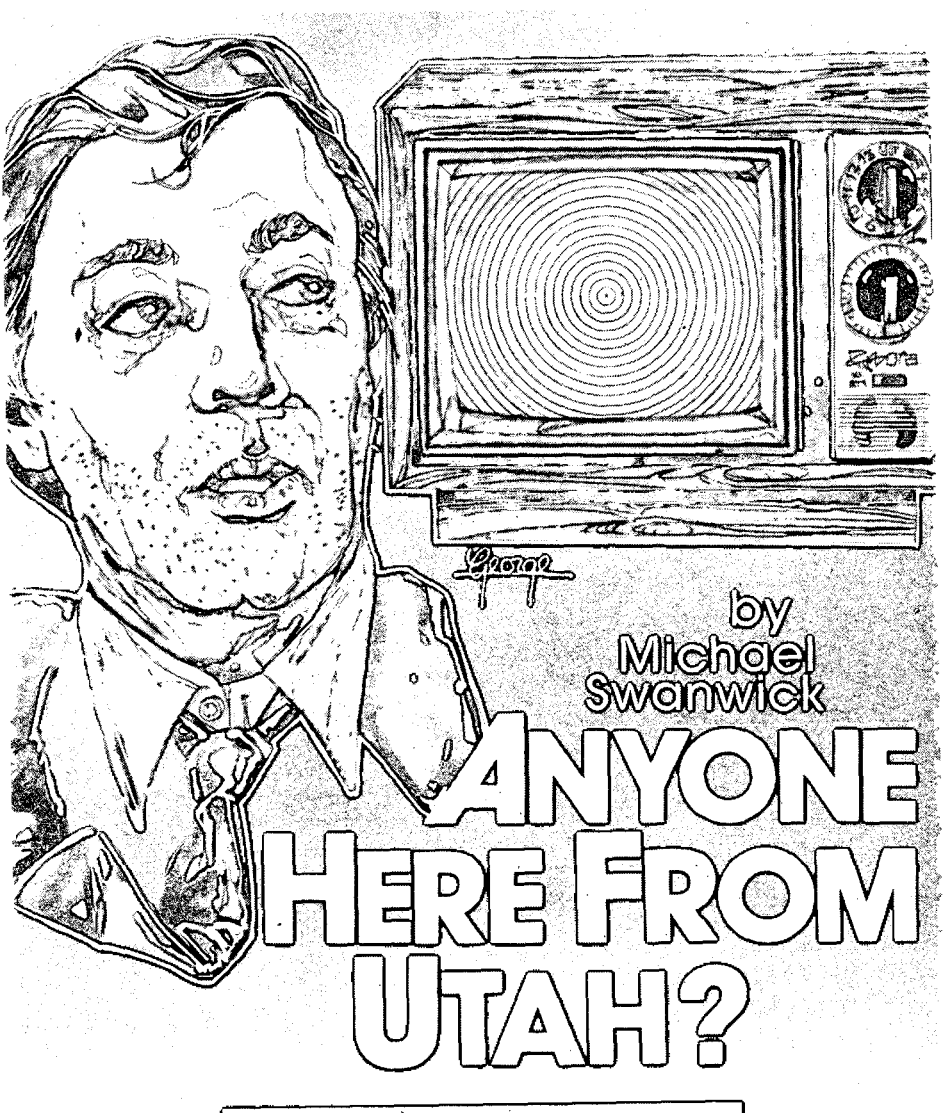

by
Michael
Swanwick

ANYONE HERE FROM UTAH?

Michael Swanwick lives in Philadelphia with his wife, Marianne Porter, and their son, Sean. If this story has any connection with reality, he may be a lot safer in Philly than he would be in Utah.

art: Arthur George

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It was early evening when I drove into Manayunk. The fog was coming across the canal from the Schuylkill and creeping slowly up the hillside. A red neon sign over Keely's buzzed and crackled. I found a space not twenty yards away, under the elevated, and parked.

Keely's is a corner tappie of the old school, the kind that still has a side-door ladies' entrance. The old women of the neighborhood use it, too, huddling over their glasses of beer in the back room, never daring go up front where the men are.

It's a quiet place. No television over the bar. A jukebox, only it wasn't in use, Monday being a slow night. There's a pool table in the back.

Midway through my first beer the little guy came in. He poked his head through the door, taking a quick peek, then whipped it back fast, like a turtle retreating into its shell. A pause, and then his round little face reappeared. He blinked rapidly, and nervously scanned the shelves over the bar. I craned my head to look, and saw only the usual assortment of bottles and such.

Finally the little guy actually *entered* the bar, took a stool to one side of me, and ordered a draught. We both drank in silence for a bit.

Then he nodded at the shelves over the bar. "No TV here," he said. And when I nodded, "Have you ever noticed how a TV set will suck you in? So that no matter how hard you try to ignore it, you always end up watching?"

He was an odd duck. There was a whiff of the streets about him, a hard, ingrained layer of poverty and grime. And yet he wore an expensive 'thinsulated' windbreaker, at least two hundred bucks in any store downtown, and though it was old and worn, it was worn to his body; he hadn't acquired it secondhand. "Why not tell me about it?" I suggested.

He eyed me nervously, then said, "Okay, listen. You ever notice how some pieces of technology seem like they're too *good* for us? Like you wonder how they can even *exist*, because they look as out-of-place as a Greyhound bus would in third-century Rome?"

"No," I said carefully. "Can't say that I have."

"Then you're not paying attention," he said angrily. "Take a look at computers—they've been around less than thirty years and already they're so small you can wear them *on your wrist*, for Chrissake. Then take a look at your car, and ask yourself why it only gets some four percent efficiency and falls apart before the payments are done. Are you trying to tell me the same people produced *both*?"

"Hey, now," I said soothingly.

The little guy clutched his glass so hard his knuckles whitened. "We got a country that can't produce a decent solar energy cell when the Arabs have got us up against the ropes, and yet we can transmit *pictures* through the *air*—and in color, too. And where did it come from? Television

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just appeared one day, complete and perfected! It didn't *evolve* the way that, say, films did."

"There was radio."

"Radio! I can make a radio out of a safety pin, an eraser and a chunk of quartz. But have you ever met anybody who actually *understands* television, who could build one from scratch?"

"Well . . ."

"And if you read up on it, it gets even weirder. Do you know what you see when you look at a TV screen?"

"Pictures, I presume."

"Wrong. You see this one little dot of light. It travels along all 525 lines of your screen sixty times a second, getting brighter and darker, and *your mind* puts this all together to form a picture. But there *is* no picture, only this little glowing dot that's like *hypnotizing* you, get it? And because the picture is assembled inside your head, it's gotten past your mental censors before you even know what it is. You believe it even when what it tells you contradicts what you actually experience."

"I take you don't watch much television, huh?"

He sighed, buried his nose in his drink. "I used to watch it just like everybody else—four, maybe five hours a night. I went on a camping trip in the Grand Tetons in Wyoming so I could be *by myself* and I took along a battery portable. Without even thinking about it.

"Second day out, I accidentally kicked the thing over a cliff. Boy, was I mad at myself! I almost turned around and went home. But I'd spent so much on the trip I went on without it. And you know what? After a week or so, I felt a lot better without the constant yammer-yammer-yammer of that damned box. My vision was better, I had more energy, and I thought a lot more clearly. But I was out in the wilderness all this time. When I came out again and picked up my car, I found out the truth."

"What *was* the truth?"

"Well, first of all, I wasn't in Wyoming, I was in Ohio."

I couldn't help it. I laughed.

The little guy glared. "Okay, okay—but it was damned scary to find that in the shops and lodges and tourist places people all talked as though we were in Wyoming, but out on the street, everyone was in Ohio. And if you *asked* them about this, they got this really blank expression, like zombies, and just walked away." He stared disconsolately into his beer. "After a while I noticed that people were a little *less* vague if they'd been away from the TV for a few hours, and I made the connection.

"I figured that *some*body was controlling our reality for *some* reason, and I set out to discover just what was going on. I drew out my savings from the bank and hit the road." He smiled self-deprecatingly. "Looking

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for America, you know? Only I *for sure* didn't find it. You do much traveling?"

"I'm a salesman. I get around."

"Well, have you noticed how about ten years ago the quality of life in New York City took a nosedive? I mean, it used to be the Queen of Cities, the Big Apple, right? How did it get so dirty and slummy and mean so fast? I went to New York City and looked, and you know what I found?"

"You tell me," I said.

"A crater. About a mile across and radioactive as hell. You stand on the lip and stare down through these wispy little clouds of steam and there's this blue glow down at the bottom. That's all that's left of Manhattan."

"Now wait a minute, I was *there* just last week."

He shook his head firmly. "Nope. That was Newark. They shifted the business and financial centers there, changed a few roadsigns, and brainwashed everyone to think they were in New York."

"Aw, come on. Millions of people go in and out of New York every day—you couldn't hush something like that up."

"You could if you controlled television. Listen, I've seen things that could practically fry your brains. Did you know that there are Communist Chinese troops in North Dakota? The entire state is under occupational rule! They've got concentration camps and slave labor and. . . . And Utah—have you ever met anyone from Utah?"

"Well, not actually . . ."

He nodded emphatically. "Damn straight you haven't! My God, the things I've seen. I was in Los Angeles last month when the President of the United States presented the key to the city to Adolf Hitler—in *public*, mind you! Except for this little crowd who applauded, nobody seemed to notice."

"Reagan would never—" I began, but he cut me off.

"No, no, not that damned cowboy actor—the *real* President. Richard Nixon." He paused, stared thoughtfully into his drink. "Hitler was in a wheelchair, wearing a white suit. I think he was senile."

I'd heard enough. "So what are you doing about this?" I asked, cutting him off. "I presume you're doing *something*."

The little guy looked crestfallen. "Actually," he confessed, "I don't *know* what to do. I'm not the hero type. I just go around to bars—when I can find one without an infernal television set—and strike up conversations. I tell people that if they can just give up the TV for a few short weeks, they can set themselves free. Maybe if there were a *lot* of us, we could do something."

"I see. Made many converts?"

Now he looked downright heartbroken. "Not a one."

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"Tell you what," I said, "If it makes you feel any better, *I'll* give it up—right here and now!"

The little guy looked me full in the eye, and there was a kind of dignity in defeat to him at that moment. "No you won't," he said. "You'll promise to, and you'll go back home or to your hotel room tonight, and you'll switch it on without even thinking about it." He finished his drink, and left a quarter on the bar for a tip. "But at least I've tried, and God knows that's all one man can do."

He slid off his bar stool.

"Oh, Sammy?" I said casually. "I'd like to show you something."

He turned, puzzled. "How did you know my—" I pulled the device from my pocket. It was small, about the size of a pack of cigarettes, and it had a two-inch-square screen.

"Ever see one of these?" I asked. "It's hot off the assembly line. A year from now everybody will have one." I waved it back and forth gently. He tried to look away, but could not. His eyes were riveted to the little moving dot.

"Pretty nifty, huh?" I smiled. His trail had been cold when I picked it up in Utah. I had every reason to feel pleased with myself.

Sweat beaded up on his forehead. He clenched his teeth, but could not look away. "Who *are* you people?" he asked chokingly.

"Who are we, Sammy? We're the ones who matter. The power behind the multinationals. The guys who keep things going. The little voice that whispers in your ear," I said mockingly. "What do you care who we are?"

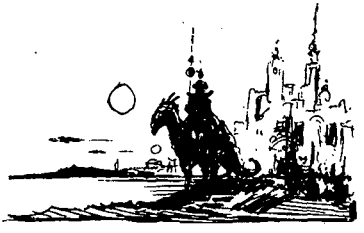
I didn't know how much he would hear. His eyes were glazing over quickly. But to my surprise he managed to say, "And now you kill me." He didn't sound as if he much cared anymore.

"Sammy, Sammy." I tousled his hair. "Imagine that you run a kennel and you find one of your dogs has burrowed halfway out. He's caught under the wire and is squirming to get free. Do you kill him?"

I waited for an answer, got none. "No, you do not," I answered for him. "Here." I placed the set in his hand. "It's a gift."

He stood there, numbly staring at it. All the contradictions, the fears and unacceptable memories were fading gently away.

On the way out, I paused to say, "Show it to your friends." ●



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THE BERSERKER ENTERS A PLEA ON THE DEATH OF GREATER LOS ANGELES

Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity

I was just another could-be maniac
like any other plebe,
living from drug to drug,
hopping strato-jets,
bending out for a week on uppers,
catching the heavy holos
whenever I could,
awaiting the click of inspiration.

I was just another hightech madman
in a longsuit and flatcap,
ticked by tension,
teasing the deadly dials,
spacing in the chain cafes,
visioning the latent disaster
in sixteen dollar lasers
and backpack megatons.

I was only another serial lunatic
about to go it all at once,
jump riding the endless strips
from cordon to cordon,
squinting in the carbon sunlight,
imaging random slaughter:
flash frames of red devastation
on the flesh crowded streets.

—Bruce Boston

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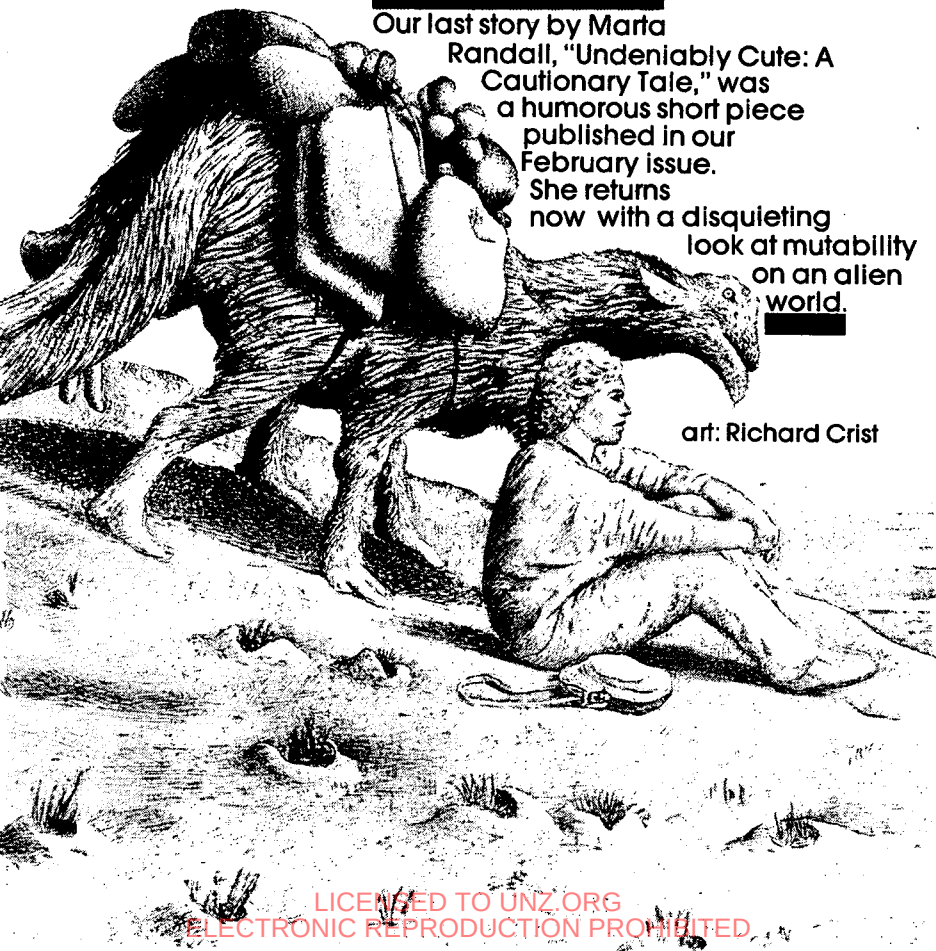
SEA CHANGES

by Marta Randall

Our last story by Marta Randall, "Undeniably Cute: A Cautionary Tale," was a humorous short piece published in our February issue. She returns now with a disquieting look at mutability on an alien world.



art: Richard Crist

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It's been a long season, but I made my quota and now I come, with pleasure, down to the coast for the autumn curing. Season's end brings me far south of my usual cove, but this one will do just as well. Sandy hills covered with rough grass slope to a small crescent beach, protected by arms of boulders on either side; the great, warm ocean current piles fog along the mouth of the cove. It looks as though the end of the world lies just beyond the blue-gray rocks; even at mid-day the fog doesn't lift, lying dense at the cove's mouth and never entering the cove itself. In the sunlight, at the foot of the rolling, grassy dunes, it is quite warm.

The land slips gradually into ocean here. I strip and plunge into the sea, taking my spear with me. There is little to harm me on Greengate, but things still sting, or take occasional bites to find out what an alien tastes like; I've learned caution in three planet-years. Small blue fish pierce the water over a rock and sand bottom. I inspect sea plants with jointed fronds, opalescent crustaceans and, near the breakers, something I can't identify. Whatever it is sports a mass of waving, lavender arms set with brightly colored flowerets; the mass moves as I move, sideways to the spill of the waves. Those pretty, undulating arms look sharp. I don't like this. Fascinating creatures are of use, but cutting edges threaten my season's catch, fourteen perfect hides, and the high prices they will fetch at McCree's two months from now. I prod the lavender thing with my spear; I come too close and it nicks my hand. I surface, curse, and suck at the tiny wound, then submerge again and prod in earnest. I can't find the body of the damned thing, but it seems firmly rooted in the seabed and not likely to come free. Back on the beach, I stick a plaster on the nick, stretch the season's pelts on their curing frames, and anchor them securely under the gently breaking waves.

Camp goes up next: foam hut, fire pit, various articles of furniture created at random from the saffron-colored leftovers of the hut. Such luxury, after the long season following the herds, setting and baiting traps, searching for the perfect animal, the perfect pelt. Season of killing and skinning and wrestling heavy sacks from and up to Keam's sagging back, and dirt over everything, and hard rocks under my back at night. My camp is cluttered with soft things, but come winter the foam will melt harmlessly into the sand, leaving no trace of my curing camp.

Keam watches my preparations with mild, silent perplexity. He shifts from foot to foot to foot to foot to foot to foot, six-legged curiosity slouching about the camp, nuzzling into the sacks and containers. As I work I reach out absently to rough his amber fur, or pause to dig my nose into his large shoulder. He muffles softly deep in his throat; his coat smells like a forest after rain. Big, quiet, improbable beast, the only animal I know I'll never have to skin, and for this virtue I am exceedingly fond of him. He wanders off to inspect the pale grass near at the dune's crest while

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I arrange things to my liking. It's going to be a good camp, I can tell. I smile, stretch, and fall asleep in the sun.

Keam rouses me at twilight, prodding my stomach with his ungainly head. The sun falls into the gray mass of fog; the air smells, gently, of salt. I light the fire and prepare my meal. The sky is covered with stars except where the fog hides them. When I crawl into my hut I leave the flap open for the night air and the sound of waves. Keam stretches out between the hut and the fire pit, between myself and the sea.

I wake suddenly, alert and tense, and reach for the skinning knife. The noise comes again, an uneasy grunting outside the hut. I balance the knife in my palm and crouch by the door, eyes closed, living through my ears. Keam?

Keam. He twitches in his sleep, jerking his huge limbs and snorting. When I put my hand on his neck he comes wide awake, thick back-ridge hairs bristling, teeth bared, eyes wild, before he recognizes me and his fear subsides. Keam having a nightmare—it's enough to make me laugh, but he does not take well to ridicule, and he *is* scared. We've worked together for sixteen planet-months and he always sleeps deeply and frightens not at all. The beach is peaceful, unthreatening, and the sea calm. I croon into his big ears. Eventually he relaxes into sleep again.

In the morning, nightmare apparently forgotten, Keam gallops up the dune to drink at the spring and devour grass with his usual fierce appetite. I inspect the skins and detour to check on yesterday's lavender mystery. I can't find it, though I'm sure I'm checking the right place, but the sea around my skins is clear and I decide not to worry about it. Last year I wasted a month fretting about what turned out to be a harmless sea skate; I won't make that mistake again.

Trappers complain of the enforced idleness of a curing camp, but it's never bothered me. I putter and mend, fish, read through my cubes, ride with Keam to explore the arms of the cove, and make up tall tales to spin at McCree's, over a pitcher of beer. This year I think I'll transform my lavender mystery into a sea monster, something unknown and dangerous and horrifying, something to keep trappers awake during next year's curing. It's a favorite sport among us; I'm not the only one to spend season's end hatching and polishing artistic lies. The thought gives me a moment of warm pleasure and I gleefully give my monster another set of legs.

The wind rises before sunset, while I am at my fish dinner. It whips the fog at the cave's mouth, but the breeze in the cove itself is gentle and the waves grow only a little. I make sure the skins are secure before rolling into bed. Keam shelters in the lee of the hut, tucks his head between front legs, tail between back ones, and leaves his middle legs to fend for themselves.

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This time wind wakes me, high wind and pounding surf. I rush into the waves. A frame soars through the white water and chops down again; the entire chain is loose, the frames battering against each other and the hard bottom. Re-anchoring won't help, not in this surf; I have to get them out, all of them, but the frames fight me, slapping against thighs and breasts. My eyes sting. One, two, four—I fight them onto the beach, dump them, plunge into the surf again. Another two, and two—I grab for the last one as the waves throw something big and solid and animal on me. The cables rip from my hands. I clutch the thing as I go under, grabbing an arm, a thigh, snarling my fingers in a mass of hair. I'm holding a human, inert and heavy and probably dead. I grasp it and stagger up the beach. Keam snorts and backs away rapidly. I dump the body by the frames and run back to the waves. The person, body, thing can wait—my hides are ribboning against the rocks.

I can only find three of them. I curse and mutter, drag the frames higher on the beach, and crawl to the firepit to find out what I dumped there. I flick on a light and stare at it.

I was right, it's human. Breathing. The back rises and falls, labored but regularly. Smooth cheeks. Long, lank, browny-yellow hair. I turn the body over to see the soft tumble of genitals, the flat chest. Whoever the hell he is, he shouldn't be here, not by my firepit or on my beach or by my ocean, but there's nothing to do about it now. His flesh is sea-cold. I drag him into the hut and onto the pallet, cover him with my sleeping sack, and curl exhausted on the floor.

I wake at dawn. He doesn't, but he's still alive. I uncover him; I'm scratched and welted and bruised, but he looks untouched by the surf. He's not lean and tough enough to be a trapper—perhaps they've opened Greengate to tourists while I was out of touch. It seems unlikely. I throw the sack over him again, disgusted, and go to inspect my skins.

Of the eleven hides remaining, two are battered beyond use and the rest are, to one degree or another, damaged. I repair the frames, re-stretch the hides, lug them into the water, and reanchor them, and all the time I watch the comforting, fat numbers of my future credit account getting smaller and smaller. And there's nothing to be done about it. I am licensed to kill fourteen and fourteen only; even were the season not over, I could not hunt again. And I was so damned proud of my fourteen perfect kills.

Keam has gone up the dune and refuses to come down. I shrug and fix breakfast. The man stirs inside the hut. It's his fault, if he'd stayed wherever he belonged I'd not have lost three pelts, the others wouldn't be this damaged. I slop tea into a cup and carry it into the hut.

He sits, pushes hair from his face, and looks at me in puzzlement. The sleeping sack lies bunched around his hips.

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"Here." I thrust the cup at him. "Drink this."

He takes the cup and wraps his hands around it.

"Careful. It's hot."

Blank gray eyes over the cup's rim. His hands shake and I wonder if he's feverish, but when I reach to feel his forehead he jerks back, spilling hot tea over his chest. He yelps, I reach for cup and towel, life gets rather active, and I discover that he's not at all feverish and stronger than he has any right to be. The uproar brings Keam barreling down the slope. He slides his head into the hut and glares at the man with a combination of bravery and dread. The expression is irresistibly funny; I laugh, but the man huddles against the far wall and stares at Keam with horror until I shoo the animal out and mop up the tea.

"Keam's a protective soul, but you shouldn't be afraid of him."

More blankness. I speak Standard, so why doesn't he understand me? Amnesia?

Either that or he's an idiot. I am, at best, a common-sense bush medic, but amnesia seems as good a label as any to hang on the man, so I hang it. Besides, amnesiac or idiot, the label lessens my anger.

The things he knows or remembers, and the things he doesn't, bewilder me. Plates make sense to him, but not forks. Clothing escapes him completely and I give up on it. He sits in the sun, bare-assed, while light pours over his smooth skin. He resists walking and when he must he minces, grimacing with pain. He must be hurt somewhere, but when I try to put my hands to him, to palpate his body, he bolts into the hut, dives under the sack, covers everything except his eyes, and glares at me. I can't begin to figure that one out, so I shrug in disgust and go outside. After a while he totters after me and perches on a foam hummock, watching me with suspicion. I try to ignore him, but my curiosity is too great.

I ask his name, where he comes from, about the wind storm. He listens with fascinated incomprehension. Eventually I chatter just to cover his eerie silence. He doesn't seem to mind. Keam spends the entire day on the dunes and will not be tempted down, not even when the sun falls into the fog and I prepare for sleep. I enter the hut to find the idiot comfortably asleep on my pallet, in my sack, and can't get him to leave; when I shout his eyes get round and he clutches the sack to his chest. Muttering curses, I make a bed for myself on a couch outside and lie sleepless for a time, listening to his deep breathing and the sussurus of waves.

I wake to find him crouched by the fire pit, the teakettle in one hand and a cup in the other.

"What are you doing?" I swing my legs off the couch.

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He gives me an innocent smile, holds out the kettle, and says quite clearly, "Tea."

"Tea, indeed. So you can talk after all. Give me the kettle and I'll make some."

I hold out my hand, but it seems that "tea" is the limit of his vocabulary; he says it again with great satisfaction. I take the kettle and make tea. He sips cautiously while I lay fish on the grill. Then he points up the dune and says, "Keam."

I rock back on my heels. "Minnen," I say, tapping my chest. He rests his palm over his own chest and repeats my name. "No, listen to me. Tea. Keam. Minnen."

When I point to him he says "Minnen" again, uncertainly.

"No. Keam. Hut. Kettle. Tea. Pot. Fire. Minnen." I point to him again and he does a perfect imitation of my shrug before extending his empty cup.

"Tea?"

I fill the cup and serve breakfast, wishing I knew more about amnesia.

I'll have to take him to McCree's with me after the curing, unless someone comes looking for him. That, on Greengate, would be highly unlikely. And he'll have to walk, Keam can't carry him and hides and camp together. I coax him to his feet and bully him into taking steps. He totters and minces and tiptoes, glaring at me through his mop of hair, while Keam watches distrustfully from the top of the dune. When I finally let the man sit he cradles his feet in his hands and hunches over them, rocking. "Hurt?" He understands the word perfectly, first time. I go up the dune to scratch behind Keam's ears and try to talk him into coming back to camp. He nuzzles appreciatively at the scratching but won't leave the mare's-nest of grass he's made for himself by the spring. This year's camp, I think sourly, has become far too interesting.

I institute constitutionals, and the man toddles along the shoreline twice a day, morning and evening. He hates it, but I don't give him much choice—I can still scare him by offering to touch his skin. Within a week he is walking well, and a few days after that he doesn't seem to mind walking at all. I am relieved, but Keam is not impressed and still keeps his distance.

It's ten days since I dragged him from the surf. He stands with me in water, watching as I lift each frame and check the hides, testing the firmness of the cable knots and inspecting the joints on the frames.

"What is it?" It's his favorite sentence.

I tell him. He listens without any spark of remembrance and runs his long fingers over the skins. When I reach for the next frame, he touches my shoulder. I turn, surprised. It's the first time he's touched me willingly.

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"Look." The lashings on one corner of the frame are working loose.

"Damn. Why didn't I see that?" I fumble for one of the cords around my waist but his fingers are quicker than mine. He takes a cord, binds the frame, and beams at me. He's done a good job of it. I'm not entirely pleased.

"What is it?" he says again as I reel in the fish traps. I explain. He frowns, then comprehension lights his face.

"Fish," he says eagerly, and flops into the water. He surfaces immediately, coughing and sputtering. I grab his shoulder and he jerks away from me.

"That's not air, stupid. You have to hold your breath." Then I have to explain to him what that means. He hyperventilates gravely and is gone. I shout furiously and Keam, from the shore, answers me with grunts. The man pops up in front of me, grinning, with a flapping fish in each hand.

"Did you get those from the traps?" I demand. "Damn it, if you've broken them—"

I jerk the trap cables angrily. The traps are full of fish, the openings undisturbed. It's not possible—and how the hell can he swim if he has to be told how not to breathe? I yell questions at him, waving my arms. He smiles blissfully and shrugs. Later, when I go up the dune to be grumpy in Keam's company, the animal accepts only a few pets before moving away gently, putting the spring between us. I sit by myself, hurling pebbles at the sea.

A few days pass. Now, when he's not following me around asking endless questions, he lies on a couch scanning cube after cube through the reader: novels, history, first aid, trapping and curing manuals, veterinary medicine, poetry. I ask him if he remembers how to read and he shrugs without looking up. The shrug annoys me, it's too expert a copy of my own, dangerously close to mockery. Is it fair to dislike an amnesiac? I don't know and I don't much care, either. I start spending my free time up on the dunes with Keam, who barely tolerates me.

Is today the fifteenth day after the storm, or the sixteenth? I can't clearly remember. We walk up the dune to the spring, carrying water pouches. It's hot today, sunlight pouring from a cloudless sky. He squats beside me at the spring. His skin is dark brown now, his long hair streaked with yellow-white. His beard has grown in thick and brown, although for a good eight days he had no beard at all. The newly-sprouted hair on his chest and groin is brown too. Can bodies get amnesia? No, he's probably one of those who like full-body depilatories. It's only a minor mystery. His eyes are still childlike, inquisitive, as he watches my hands move on the pouch. I hadn't noticed before, but he's beautiful. Well, I'm not given to noticing things like that. Child. Pretty, ignorant

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child. This overgrown immaturity exasperates me; I've never been the parental type and am not about to begin now.

When my pouch is full he fills his own, caps it, and walks beside me toward camp. Halfway down the dune he stops and looks across the cove to the bleak, fog-bound promontory. I stop a pace further down, wondering what he sees.

"It's very big, isn't it?" he said at last.

"The sea? Yes, it's big."

"Bigger than the land?"

"Not on this planet, no."

Silence. Then, "Cold and heavy," he says with loathing and starts down the slope without me. I almost shrug, but catch myself in time.

His language improves. His stance improves. He makes me uncomfortable. He strides around the camp, he brews tea and grills fish and makes conversation. Between one day and the next he has outgrown the simple appellation of "idiot" or "amnesiac" and become an adult male human being. And desirable, unarguably desirable. It's been a long time, I've been looking forward to finding a suitable bedmate at McCree's and should not mind finding one before then. But I do mind, and it doesn't help that I don't know why. His nakedness, his attractiveness, sound notes of caution and alarm; I can't read the seasons of his eyes. I start avoiding him, spending long hours checking the half-cured hides, sitting on boulders polishing my monster story, mourning my credit balance. But I can't keep my mind on any of it. Distracted, grumpy, upset, I slouch about the beach and feel uneasy when I strip to enter the water. I would take my troubles to Keam, but Keam won't come near me now. I am not happy. When the man calls me to dinner, I go reluctantly and keep the pit between us.

The stars cluster everywhere but to the northwest, where they are eaten by fog. I watch them from a couch I've dragged away from the camp, and on which I spend my nights. White stars, yellow stars, blue stars, red stars: birth world, home world, school world, training world, trade world. The stars above are not stars I know, despite my naming of them; I name them without conviction and without desire. The man moves around my hut, sifting through the detritus of my life. I hadn't realized he was this close. I drag the couch further down the beach, almost to the high-tide line. I can still hear him. I cover my face with my arms.

I've lost time. The beach doesn't tell me, or the sky, or the sea. I touch my hides and don't know if they are curing, or cured, or on the verge of rot. I detach the most damaged one and bring it to the beach, sit on the warm sand to prod and poke and sniff. Color? Scent? Sheen? Softness? I don't know anymore, it doesn't matter, I don't know why I worry about

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it. I leave the hide on the beach and go away. When I come back, the man has taken it into the hut and is working on it. Leave him alone.

The days fall one by one, meal to meal, sleep to waking to sleep again. He leaves food for me on the beach. I eat it while he is in the water checking the frames. Later he works on the hide, at night he sits in the lamp light and studies maps. I lie near the water's edge and watch him. Firelight dances over his skin, making shadows make dances. Water touches my feet and the image flees. I clamber onto my couch and face the waves.

When the dark is over I walk up the dune to Keam. He backs away from me, retreating pace by pace until he is gone and I sit alone in the grass. The wind blows in my face. The man stands up to his slim waist in water, pulling on lines; after a while he emerges, radiant and dripping, with fish in each hand. How strange, to want to play with fish. The sun is too hot. My head hurts. Time goes away.

"Minnen."

Maybe seabirds say it, or the waves under my hands.

"Minnen."

He wears the battered hide slung about his hips, stands by me in the water, he has a pretty face. I touch the line of skin above the hide, along his belly. Smooth and warm, rough and warm, a wonderness of texture. He takes my hand and leads me to the beach, I hold him between my palms, taste the warm salt. He is gentle, careful, he moves in me like the sea and there is something I should know about that but it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all. Inside the hut it is very warm. He smiles when he sleeps.

Today is smaller than yesterday. Yesterday was smaller than the day before. I don't know what this means. I walk in the foam while he fixes food. The dunes are empty. I walk in water, in water, in the foam.

He says the winds will rise soon. He sleeps outside to watch the skins. The hut is strange with only me in it. I sit in the doorway. The waves shiver with moonlight. I walk into the water. Cool on thighs and fingers, cool on breasts and arms. The sea glows. When the sun comes up, all red and angry, the sea looks angry too. The sun makes my shoulders sore. He walks into the water and removes carefully, delicately, one by one the skins from the frames. He folds them and puts them in gray sacks. Something comes down the dune, six-legged, curious. The man takes things around the camp and puts them all together in a bunch with cloth and ropes, puts them on the creature's back. They hold their faces together. The man smiles. I move closer to the beach. Clear water slides around my knees. The man comes to me, wearing things on his body. He says things that I don't understand. I shrug and stand in water, in water,

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watching. He turns to the beast and says something else and they climb the dune and go into the hiddenness on the other side.

The waves are higher now. The wind is cold. Sand moves and shifts beneath my soles. I look down through the clear water. Underneath it is pretty and blue and shine like colors.

There is in me a changing. ●

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THE WOMAN WHO SAVED THE WORLD

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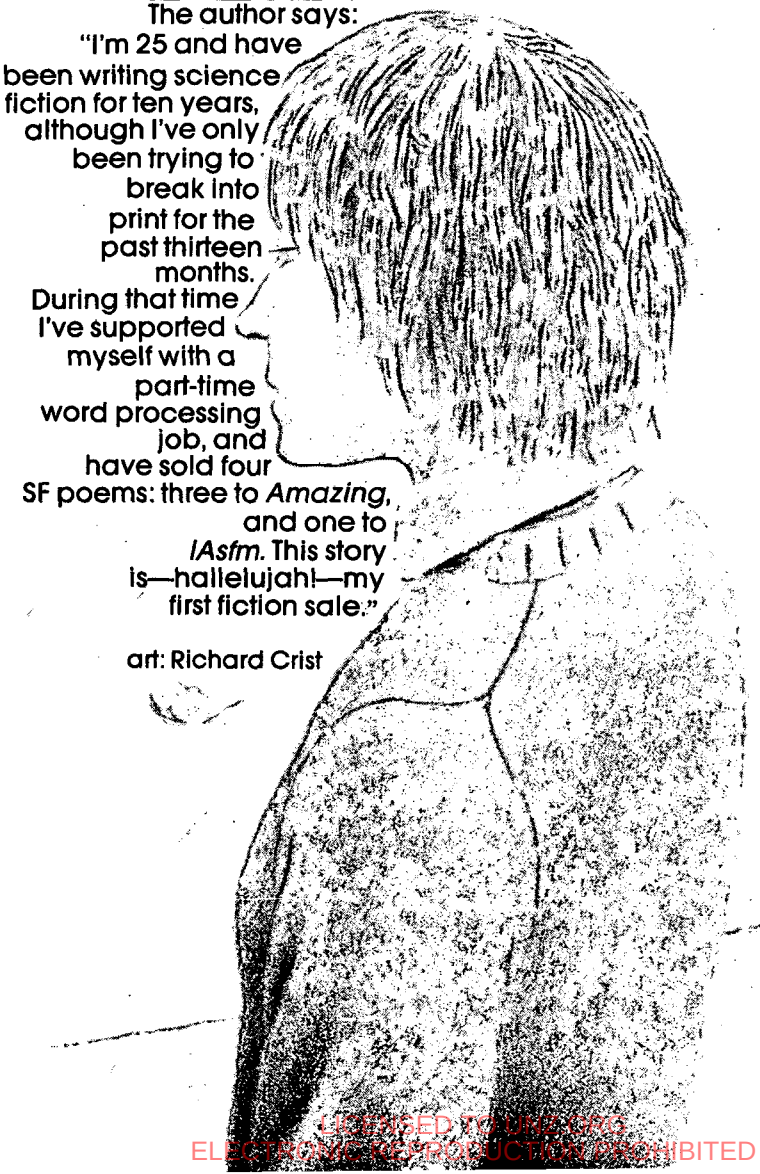
by Susan Palwick

The author says: "I'm 25 and have been writing science fiction for ten years, although I've only been trying to break into print for the past thirteen months. During that time I've supported myself with a part-time word processing job, and have sold four SF poems: three to *Amazing*, and one to *IAsfm*. This story is—hallelujah!—my first fiction sale."

art: Richard Crist



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Jeannine Thorn knew exactly what to tell the alien to rid herself of her husband and son. It was the same answer she gave anyone who asked about them, an invention designed to invite no inquiry and answer none in a world she felt to be full of prying individuals and complacent families. But the alien at the bus stop created such a violent hope in her that she believed herself to be telling it something extraordinary, and forgot that her story answered the questions she was asked only because it had been constructed to answer any question.

Meeting the alien was a windfall in a life grown so tangled and bitter that it had driven her, on a rainy Saturday morning, to run away from home at the unlikely age of thirty-two. She waited for the bus clutching only her purse, with no idea where she was going except that the journey had to begin here, because the car was dead, putrefying in a puddle of oil in the driveway; the garage wouldn't fix it without payment for previous repairs, and so it would never be fixed.

Somehow this one indignity had become emblematic of all the others; when Jeannine had awoken that morning, a faint smell of oil in her nostrils and Daniel already departed for the track, young Phillip never returned from wherever he had spent his Friday night, she had dressed and simply fled, unreasoning. The only thing she regretted leaving was the house, and what good was a place to live when the people you lived with were seldom there and paid no attention to you when they were, when your only company was the shrill demands of the creditors who seemed to pay no attention to anyone else? Divorce was too expensive, too complicated, would force Jeannine to confront a situation she wanted only to escape. Better just to be alone, with no questions to answer.

Her instincts for evasion led her along quiet back streets where the fewest people would notice her, to the commuter stop Daniel used during the week. It was deserted now, its plastic sides streaming with rain. Jeannine ducked inside, grateful to have been unobserved.

"Excuse me," said a soft voice at her shoulder, "but may I ask you some questions?"

Jeannine recoiled and clutched her purse more tightly, immediately assuming incipient attack; but the little man next to her (why hadn't she seen him before?) seemed innocent enough, swaddled in a raincoat, hat, and scarf, all bundled up with his hands stuffed in his pockets, although it was the beginning of April. A vagrant, clearly. You got them even in the suburbs now. Ordinarily Jeannine would have been acutely conscious of her own bedraggled clothing and damp hair—appearances having been her only asset for so long that she set maniacal store by them—but this was a common bum, someone before whom she need feel no shame.

"Please," the soft voice came again, "I need information."

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Jeannine withdrew another foot, preparing to hail a bus approaching through the dismal drizzle—but her companion had taken one hand out of his pocket, and something green, segmented and foul-smelling was emerging from the sleeve of the raincoat.

The jointed appendage wiggled, and Jeannine stared as the bus sped by, uncaught. It was a practical joke; either that or a hallucination, and if there was anything Jeannine trusted—had to trust—it was her own sanity.

"The garment is a life-support system," the gentle voice explained, "and camouflage. Exposure to your atmosphere is rather painful—do you want further proof?"

"Proof?" Jeannine echoed. "Oh yeah, sure." She was angry now at having been startled by the hoax long enough to have missed the bus; God only knew when another would come, on a weekend in this weather. "Why not just chuck the raincoat? You got tentacles or something?"

"No, I don't."

"Damn right you don't—what are you doing in that get-up? Scaring little kids or something? Get lost or I'll call the cops—"

"I think I can clear up the misunderstanding," the bum said apologetically. "Although it will be painful. . . ." The raincoat, with improbable speed, was unbuttoned and opened, revealing a slender skeletal body forming a lattice through which Jeannine could see, where any normal raincoat would have had a cloth lining, an array of lights, circuitry, and indecipherable gauges.

She yelped and would have run, had her legs not been seized by paralysis. Backed up against the plastic sides of the shelter, she suddenly remembered the monster movies she'd seen with Daniel when they were first dating. The unconvincing horrors on the screen and the darkness of the theater had offered ample excuse for furtive embraces, a process which culminated in the darkness of parked cars and Phillip's birth a suspiciously short time after his parents' marriage. Premature, Jeannine had told everyone firmly, although he was the largest baby anyone in the family could remember.

She could barely recall the movie plots, having watched only closely enough to know when to shriek and clutch Daniel. They had all been about creatures who came to earth looking for specimens and carried off the best people they could find—usually handsome scientists and bombshell blondes—who, being earth people and geniuses, always managed to escape and save the world. It occurred to Jeannine, through her terror, that there were possibilities here.

"What do you want?" she asked the thing in the raincoat, although she already knew what it wanted: specimens. That was what monsters always wanted.

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The raincoat was quickly sealed. The wiggling appendage withdrew with what sounded like a sigh of relief, and Jeannine found herself able to move her legs again. "Please pardon the restraint," said the voice, which Jeannine realized now wasn't travelling through the air at all, but only speaking inside her head (the movie monsters did that a lot too, although she'd spent most of those scenes negotiating the tricky business of theater armrests). "I am on an expedition to catalog intelligent species; the advantage of intelligent species is that they can provide information directly, although, to minimize trauma, I must make only limited contact . . . you are my first informant. Will you tell me about your race?"

"What do you want to know?" Jeannine asked, her heart pounding. This was going better than she could have dared hope.

"General social characteristics, behavior patterns . . . a representative sample will suffice: a description of yourself, say, and those closest to you." The voice paused, and continued with a faint note of alarm, "You are representative, aren't you?"

"Oh yes," Jeannine answered, in precisely the same tone in which she replied "Fine, fine," to inquiries into her home life. She felt a vague unease which might have become guilt, had she allowed it; but aside from a bus journey to nowhere, her only other option was to go back home, to the empty house with its ringing telephone and stinking driveway. The smell of oil had lately become a reminder of other odors—the sweet reek which clung to Phillip whenever he stumbled back, at increasingly frightening hours, from wherever he was when he was supposed to be at school; the stench of the two rats, alternately tormented and ignored, which he insisted on keeping in his room. Once he hadn't put the cage back together properly, so that when she'd gone in to clean they'd been hopping around the floor on their spindly kangaroo legs, nearly under her feet.

She still had nightmares about that, not knowing where Phillip was, Phillip at fourteen already a truant, a waste, and the rats on the rug. Phillip's being loose and the rats' being loose had become one to her, one with Daniel's gambling away his salary and whatever of hers he managed to get his hands on, one with the derelict car. Her resolve congealed into a cold spot which settled painfully in her stomach.

"Yes," she told the thing in the raincoat, "I'd be glad to give you information." Information on Daniel and Phillip, who would then be carried away as specimens and would never come back, because they were too stupid to escape. The thought that she might be carried off instead occurred to her momentarily, in a haze devoid of fear; she could surely outwit monsters. She was doing it now.

"That would be just fine," she heard herself saying in a clear, untrou-

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bled voice she didn't recognize as her own. "I wouldn't mind talking to you at all."

And she proceeded to tell the alien all about her honest, upright, hard-working husband, her bright and obedient boy. She praised them extravagantly, extolling their sensitivity, honor, conscience—presented a vivid picture of the perfect mate and child just as she imagined it herself so often before her hasty marriage. She told the alien of a harmonious family life in which she never would have had to get a menial office job to try to salvage something from the money Daniel squandered at the bookie's and Phillip stole to buy whatever it was that made him so glassy-eyed; by way of describing her lovely house, she managed to provide her address. The creature listened attentively, and when Jeannine was done she thought, with an ache of longing, it must want to kidnap them now. God, I would. Why can't it really be like that?

"Thank you," came the soft voice in her head. "That was most useful. And these are common characteristics of your species?"

"Oh yes," Jeannine answered, hoping it wouldn't hear the quiver in her voice. (How could it understand her, anyway? Translating machine? ESP? However it managed, it seemed to be having no problems.) Struck by inspiration, she gave it a brief report on her charming neighbors—who were in fact filthy and hostile—and those wonderful girls on the Acme checkout lines, who in reality overcharged Jeannine whenever she went into the store. Maybe the alien would kidnap all of them. It was at least as likely as her having been chosen to give the report in the first place.

The raincoat rustled, and the voice sighed, "Very informative . . . if you'll allow me to monitor—ah. Yes, I was afraid of that. Sometimes visitors have unpleasant effects on the local habitat, upsetting delicate balances, creating disorder . . . my instruments reveal that such has indeed been the case here."

The coat rustled for another few moments before the creature continued, "Such disturbances have now been corrected wherever possible; I apologize profoundly for any inconvenience."

"That's all right," Jeannine answered, not understanding much except that it sounded as if Daniel and Phillip might be gone. She felt steeped in calm, the way she always had in high school after having to talk in front of the class, when she could go back to her seat secure in the knowledge that her actual ignorance of the subject hadn't been discovered.

"Many thanks for your kindness," the voice said, and Jeannine almost found herself wishing that she could be the one to be kidnapped. Daniel had never been as grateful for anything she'd done as the alien seemed to be for the massive lie she'd told it; Phillip, although he was human, had never been as polite.

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She started to say something, but the figure in the raincoat had somehow vanished. So had the rain, and thoughts of flight; the wet grass on the side of the road sparkled in hot sunshine now, and Jeannine headed back home, hurrying past other people's fragrant hedges and lush lawns. She had to go back to check, in case . . . in case of what, she couldn't have said, tempted to believe that none of it had happened, that what awaited her was only the endless line of creditors, the stinking car and ringing telephone, people trying to snatch possessions away from beneath her fingertips—the chaos which seemed to have become exponentially more complicated each time she returned to the house.

But arising in counterpoint, like the tenuous song of spring crickets, came the hope *They may be gone for good now, both of them, carried off, gone by now—yes, it would be gone by now, because the creature said it had already done whatever it wanted to do to fix things. To make things better. Let them be gone, please, please.*

She heard the rumble of the TV before she even reached the front door. The noise floated out of the open living room window, followed by Daniel's cough, and Jeannine stopped dead on the walk, trembling, suddenly unable to feel her fingertips. Things weren't better, and might be worse; Daniel was back from the track already, which meant he'd bet all the money he'd had and been unable to borrow more, had come back after placing bets with gambling friends, with bookies, with whomever would take them—and was watching the races now or the baseball games or even game shows, a newscast, anything. He'd bet on anything, on the number of casualties in El Salvador that day or the number of inches of rain in Florida—the stock market or Let's Make a Deal—anything, and sit in front of the television feverishly calculating odds, wins and losses, talking constantly about the next bet, the next one, the one that would bring in a fortune and solve their problems forever.

She couldn't bear it; not after the hope she'd had, however slim, that jointed thing and the blinking array where a lining should have been. She stood shaken, physically ill, torn between tears and fury and finally giving way to both.

The front door wasn't locked. Jeannine stormed into the house, into the living room, conscious only of an aching haze in which Daniel sat, hunched in the old armchair, watching the TV with that look of intensity she knew so well.

He jumped when he realized she was there, looked up at her with the startled expression he wore whenever he was caught in the act of calculating handicaps and odds. "Jen!" he greeted her, "Jen, where were you, you won't believe this—"

"No," she spat, tasting acid, "I won't!" At least the phone wasn't ring-

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ing; it had probably been disconnected again. "What are you betting on now? It never stops, does it—"

"But Jen, it's not—"

"Don't 'Jen it's not' me! You lost everything at the track again, didn't you?"

"No, Jeannine—"

"People beating our door down, the car broken—I've had to walk to work for a week, and you go to the track again!"

"But Jeannine, I didn't go!" He'd gotten up now, reached for her hand; she pulled away as if it had been the green thing trying to touch her. "I wasn't there, I swear it."

"Oh, where were you? Losing at cards? Losing at pool? What were you betting on, if not on the horses?"

"Nothing!" he cried. "I'm not betting on anything—that's what I've been trying to tell you. I don't want to anymore. Jeannine—"

"Oh, stop! You've said that so many times I can't even count them anymore. Do you think I believe it?" She swung to face the television which had been gibbering unnoticed in the background, steeling herself to confront Monty Hall or some uniformed pitcher, and instead caught John Wayne mid-drawl. "What the hell is this? You're betting on *Westerns* now?"

"It's *True Grit*. I'm not gambling now, Jen—"

"*True Grit*?" she echoed, terrified that both of them were going mad. "Christ, Daniel, what're you playing for this time? How many points there are on his spurs or something?"

"No! Jeannine, stop gawking at the set. Look at me." He reached again, caught her hand this time, tugged it until she turned. "Jen, something strange happened, really it did, all of a sudden when I was going to the track—"

"Oh! So you admit you were there!"

"Jeannine, dammit, let me finish! Jen, look, I was going to the track. I was. Joe Megan was giving me a lift, and all of a sudden something happened and I said, 'Joe, take me home, I must be sick. . . .' Like a little kid going to the circus who gets scared of the elephants, Jen . . . we'd just started out; it couldn't have been more than twenty minutes ago. And you know what an SOB Joe is, and he was in a rotten mood 'cause we'd gotten going late. I thought he'd gripe about coming back, but he just smiled and swung the car around. Like he didn't mind at all. Don't you see—"

"All I see is that you're here goofing off while the car's sitting stinking in the driveway, and we can't fix it!"

He relented, sighing, and said, "All right. All right, Jen. It'll be fixed

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soon. Because I don't want to gamble anymore. Only—Jen, I don't know what changed. And I don't know what to do instead."

"Pay the bills," she cut in mockingly, noting his wince with bitter satisfaction. "And do something about Phillip. Where is he, anyway? Did he ever come home?"

"He's over talking to Bill Andersen," Daniel answered, watching her carefully. "Something about mowing their lawn. He'll be back soon."

Jeannine shook her head, not trusting herself to speak. The Andersens were the filthy and hostile neighbors, who would no more have considered maintaining their property than Phillip would have laid hands on a lawnmower. She didn't think he even knew how to operate one, and had a sudden vision of his being pulled, stoned and uncomprehending, into the maw of the thing.

She giggled, beginning to feel feverish, but just then the kitchen door banged and Jeannine heard her son's heavy stride, the awkward gait of adolescence. She turned to face him as he entered the room, Daniel still clinging to her hand and Wayne still drawling, and with a shock met a glance which saw her, and recognized what it saw.

"Hi, Mom." He looked bewildered, covered with bits of cut grass.

The creature, Jeannine thought. *What did it do? Could . . . no. No. Impossible.*

She pushed aside a sudden onslaught of implications, and demanded aloud, "Where have you been?" because it was the only way she'd greeted him for so long that she didn't know what else to say.

"Mr. Andersen was showing me how to work his lawnmower. He's doing it this time, 'cause the grass is so shaggy, but I will from now on." He blinked at her and said, "They're going to give me five dollars a week. That's pretty good, isn't it? For a little lawn?"

Jeannine swallowed. All of this could be perfectly normal, couldn't it? Had to be. "That's not what I meant, Phillip. I meant last night, when you didn't come home."

"Oh. That." He blushed, staring at the carpet. "A party. I'll come home earlier next time. Midnight? Is that okay? I don't know why I stayed so long anyway."

Daniel started to say something, but Jeannine cut him off, feeling her throat beginning to tighten, her voice taking on its usual shrillness. "Fine! Go do your homework, then—and clean your room for a change."

"I'm going to, Mom—"

"And make sure you feed those precious rats of yours, and put that stupid cage back together right so they don't get out again! If that happens one more time we're getting rid of them, hear me?"

"They're called gerbils," Phillip answered quietly, without his usual whine. Jeannine flinched at the pain in his voice, steeled herself against

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it; she had done nothing for which to feel remorse. "They aren't rats. They're gerbils, Mom, and I fed them when I got back today."

"Speaking of which," Daniel added, "where were you, anyway?"

Jeannine opened her mouth and closed it again, knowing that she couldn't possibly tell them about the green thing, the voice in her head. They were both staring at her now, Daniel with the tender concern she'd mistaken for conscientiousness when she was seventeen and Phillip with a quivering chin. She couldn't remember the last time either of them had looked at her, been able to tear themselves away from their passions to look at her; it unnerved her, like being under a microscope.

"A walk," she said finally. "I went for a walk to get the hell away from this dump, if you must know."

"Jen," Daniel said gently, "I swear things are different now. I know you don't believe that, and I can't explain it, but it's true."

Jeannine shuddered, believing far more than she wanted to. "Let me help you with the shopping," Daniel said, and she remembered with a start that she always went to the supermarket on Saturday. "That's a long hike, with the car broken."

"I'll do it," she managed, desperate now to get out of the house. "The walk will clear my head."

"But you can't carry all that—"

"I'll take a cart," she answered, unable to keep from adding, "I've done it before."

"Phillip should at least go with you," Daniel persisted, and Phillip, watching wide-eyed from the entrance to the kitchen, said, "Do you want me to, Mom?"

"No," she snapped, sensing his recoil before she saw it, immediately feeling wretched. "Go clean up—you're a mess. And make sure you do your homework!"

"All right," he mumbled, acquiescing for the first time in all the long years she'd been lecturing him about the importance of good grades, of study. He turned and went upstairs, shedding grass cuttings; Jeannine, battling confusion and claustrophobia, bolted for the door.

"Wait!" Daniel called. "You'll need money." He fished in his pocket for bills as though he gave her money every day, as though there were nothing at all unusual about it. "Here, Jen . . . see? Are you sure you don't want me to go with you?"

She shook her head, and clutched the two twenties he gave her as if grasping at a lifeline.

The supermarket was less crowded than usual, or maybe it only seemed that way because there was less cursing and grumbling than on other Saturdays, less shoving of cans and carts, fewer disputes over places in

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line. Jeannine shopped with a determined air of routine, seeking out bargains and relentlessly maintaining the old facade, the standard charms against the perils of another week: a box of tissues to keep in the car, as if she knew exactly when it would be working again—lunch meat for Phillip, as if pretending hard enough that he went to school and ate lunch there would mean he really did.

When she got to the checkout line she deliberately chose her least favorite cashier, a snooty college kid who always rang up wrong prices and then acted as if you had to be cheap to ask her to fix her mistakes. Stupid, Jeannine thought; what will this prove? Why torment yourself? Move to another line.

But just then the girl glanced at her with a flicker of mascara-layered lashes, the faintest twitch of the mouth. Recognition, that; she had to stay now, or lose face, admit somehow that this child fifteen years her junior was more than her equal. She squared her shoulders, flexing her hands on the handlebars of the cart as if preparing for a sparring match, and made a careful mental note of which items were on sale.

It was always the mark-downs that caused the problems; this lovely creature, jeweled hands playing swift and assured over the register, rang up full prices as often as not, no doubt never having had need of sales. She was flirting with the man ahead of Jeannine now, lowering her lashes and dimpling as she pulled cans and boxes over the little electronic window which read the prices.

"Andrea!" she said with a laugh, echoing the pin on her smock which read "Hi! I'm Andrea, with the fastest fingers in town!" and then his purchases were rung up and he paid, Andrea gracing him with a final demure flutter of her lids before turning, her eyes immediately drooping when she saw Jeannine.

"These are on sale," Jeannine said loudly, having pulled all the sale items and put them in front. "Make sure you ring them up right."

Andrea nodded carelessly, cracking gum. "Yeah, okay—I think they entered everything for this week but we'll see if the machine remembers." She started pulling things over the little window as Jeannine craned her head to make sure the prices were right. A box of Brillo Pads was rung up at $1.09; Jeannine opened her mouth just as Andrea said smoothly, "Whoops—they missed that one," and did something graceful and complicated to the register which changed the figure to $.99. She shot Jeannine a small smile which seemed to say, *Just catch me if you can, lady.*

Jeannine smiled back, because that was just what she meant to do, and kept checking prices, secure now, as absorbed in the numbers as if that strange thing at the bus stop had never happened at all. And indeed, she was starting to think it never had, lulled by her certainty that nothing had changed, that some of the prices were bound to be wrong.

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But none of them were. None of them. Andrea hit the last few buttons and said "Fifty-one seventy-five," completely matter of fact. Jeannine opened her wallet, feeling herself beginning to tremble as she pulled out the forty Daniel had given her, a ten of her own. None of the prices wrong, for the first time in all the months she'd been haggling with Andrea. *The creature*, she thought, *all those lies I told . . .* The sequence which had begun at the house cried out to be completed; instead she fled into the necessities of the moment, giving the fifty to Andrea and bending her head to look for the $1.75. There was a single and two quarters.

Jeannine blinked and froze, trying to remember how much cash she'd had the previous evening. She'd surely had more—but then she remembered that she hadn't, that on Friday there had been some collection at work she'd given to, so as not to seem cheap, an expenditure she'd resented all day and then forgotten in the morning's unthinking flight, the encounter with the space creature. So that she now had only this bill and change, and not enough to pay the impossibly correct total.

"It's another buck seventy-five," Andrea prompted her. Jeannine resolutely pulled out the $1.50, put it on the counter, and said in a thin voice, "I know I have another quarter. . . ." She started going through her pockets, burning with humiliation, trying not to notice Andrea's raised eyebrows, trying not to feel all the eyes that were on her now—everyone in the store, it felt like, with her pockets empty, nothing there at all.

"I don't understand," Jeannine protested, unable to bear this weight of observation. "I had more money this morning, I know I did. It must have fallen out of my bag somehow."

"Here," came a woman's voice from the line behind her. Jeannine turned, panicking, to find someone holding out a quarter. "Here, take it—we all get caught a little short sometimes. It's all right."

Jeannine stared at the quarter, using all her self-control to stay where she was and not bolt from the store. Nothing to do but take the coin, and she did; handed it to Andrea without being able to raise her eyes, gripped by the old nightmare, the terror of standing in front of the class and being labelled an imposter. It was happening now, with no way of waking.

"Don't take it too hard," came the voice of the woman who'd given her the quarter. "Good heavens, it's only twenty-five cents—why, I won't even hold it out of Phil's pay." She laughed, and Jeannine turned, stricken, to find Molly Andersen regarding her with broad good humor.

By the time she got the cart back home, having refused Molly's offer of a ride, her arms were tense and aching. Daniel met her in the driveway, looking relieved.

"Jen, are you all right? You took so long."

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"Long lines." She lifted a bag; he took the remaining two and tagged along anxiously next to her, too close after all these years of distance.

"Everything all right? No problems?"

Too few, Jeannine thought with an undercurrent of terror, but she couldn't tell him that. "Everything's fine. Where's Phillip?"

"Inside, watching TV. Hey—while you're at it, you might want to check out the paper."

She nodded, preoccupied, and left the groceries in the kitchen for Daniel to cope with as best he could. She found Phillip demolishing a bag of potato chips, dividing his attention between a comic book and another John Wayne movie.

"Do your homework?" Jeannine asked.

"Uh-huh. 'Cept the English. Sentence diagrams." He squirmed, adding shame-faced, "I guess I'm pretty far behind. Can you help me with it later? You said you used to be good at English."

"All right. Is your room clean?"

"Yes, Mom."

"I'm going to check it," she said in the tone that meant, *You'd better not be lying*, but Phillip only looked up at her with pleading eyes.

"And then you'll help me with my homework?"

"All right, Phillip." Jeannine bent to pick up the afternoon newspaper, which lay next to the chair; whenever she went into Phillip's room she carried something with which to protect herself from the rats, should they somehow have escaped from their plastic tunnels.

"Oh," Daniel called from the kitchen as she was starting upstairs, "somebody called while you were at the store."

Jeannine stopped and reached for the railing, wondering if a bank had called about a bounced check, if Sears was trying to repossess the vacuum cleaner, if some betting buddy of Daniel's was pressing for payment on a wager. *C'mon, Jen, please, give me the money to pay it—just a loan, Jen, because I'll make it back with interest next week.* But Daniel's voice continued cheerfully, amid the rustle of grocery bags, "Some consumer survey—what kind of toilet paper or instant coffee we use, or something. They're going to send us some samples . . . Jen? You there?"

"That's nice," she forced out. Free samples: more proof. The state of Phillip's room would clinch it.

When she got there she shut the door gingerly behind her, in case the rats were loose. But they were secure in their cage next to the window, and the room was cleaner than Jeannine had ever seen it. Clothing had been put away, the bed made—if lumpily—some attempt made to store the ubiquitous comic books, if only in decaying cardboard cartons.

On autopilot now, Jeannine began quietly, methodically, searching desk and dresser drawers. The newspaper tucked under her arm, she

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sorted through school supplies, more comic books, mismatched socks, pawed uncaringly past a small stack of Playboys hidden under some winter pajamas. She went through all the drawers, the closet, and found nothing—checked under the bedclothes and under the rug, and at last even peered cautiously into the rat cage. The horrible things were bright-eyed and well-fed, pattering obscenely through their sun-bathed labyrinth. Nothing was concealed here.

Jeannine turned away, exhausted, and only then noticed the carelessness a search attuned to secrecy hadn't uncovered: a small, unevenly-rolled cylinder sticking out from between the dresser and the wall. It was placed too heedlessly to have been hidden, surely no more significant than the knick-knacks and bits of clothing occupying other corners of the room.

Jeannine picked it up, noting with clinical detachment that it was unsmoked, and retreated to the far end of the room. On an impulse, she flipped open the newspaper, to find the front page filled with the headlines "Ceasefire in El Salvador," "Peace Talks Resumed in the Middle East," and "Lull in Gulf War."

Not given to following the news, she skimmed the articles only enough to learn that cessation of hostilities had been sudden, simultaneous, and inexplicable even to the participants. *The creature*, she thought with a chill, finally completing the realization that had begun in the checkout line, *all those lies I told—it believed me*! Settling her back against the wall and sliding to a sitting position, she began trying to remember the end of the interview, what had happened after she wove that ridiculous fairy tale.

"Mom?" Phillip's voice came plaintively from the hall, breaking her concentration. "Mom, are you done yet?"

"A few more minutes, Phillip!"

She heard his footsteps retreating downstairs, began reconstructing the scene at the bus stop. Unpleasant effects, the alien had said, something about correcting disturbances. All those lies, Jeannine told herself, all those beautiful lies—and it believed me! It believed me. It looked around and saw people weren't like that, but it thought . . . it thought that was its fault, all the ugly things. That we were only like that because it was there . . . unpleasant effects on the habitat.

So it changed the world to what I said, because it thought I was telling the truth. It didn't know what a lie was.

"Mom?!" Phillip said outside the door, and Jeannine got up, as if in a trance, to open it for him, leaving the newspaper on the floor.

"What's this?" she asked softly, holding out the joint. "I found this behind your dresser, Phillip."

She watched him intently, with eyes accustomed to deceit, but he

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flushed hotly and said, "I threw the rest out, honest I did, Mom—I just missed that one. The rest is gone, Mom."

His voice sounded like Daniel's had when he'd said he didn't know what had changed, didn't know what to do instead. She wondered what they'd say if she told them what had happened, and why.

"All right," she told Phillip after a pause, apprehensive, still unable to believe that this was innocence, rather than some flawless new method of betrayal. "All right. I'll throw it out for you, then."

"Then you'll come down?" Phillip asked, looking relieved. "To help me with the sentences?"

"In a minute." He left and she turned to retrieve the paper, unwilling to trust any of this so soon—that it was real, that it wouldn't be gone some morning when she woke up, like the promises that had never been kept and the bets which were never won. But the paper existed, solid, those impossible headlines as clear as the quarter in Molly Andersen's palm, as clear as Phillip's unclouded eyes and Daniel's hovering concern. All those people suddenly grown peaceful and kind, because she had said so. Somehow she had the feeling that the news would only get better.

I saved the world, Jeannine thought. Like someone in those old movies. I saved the world by lying, and I don't know how to live in it anymore. I don't know how to live with people who aren't lying too.

She stood there, miserable, holding the joint, and knew that by rights she should be overjoyed. She had everything she'd wanted now, the problems gone or going; she should have been happy. Anyone would know that. . . .

. . . Except the alien. The alien wouldn't have known it, any more than it had known a lie. I didn't say anything about myself, Jeannine remembered in pain, nothing—it was all about Daniel and Phillip, and the Andersens, and Andrea, and everybody else—nothing about Jeannine, because anyone would know that if all that were different, I would be too. Except the creature. It never looked at me, to see if I were disturbed and needed fixing. I never said anything about myself it could have changed me into.

That lovely lie, she saw now, was the same tale she'd told everyone she knew, the web she'd spent fourteen years spinning. How are you, Jeannine? (Fine, fine.) How are Daniel and Phillip? (Just wonderful.) Are you happy? (Oh, yes, of course.) The creature from space couldn't have helped her even if it had wanted to, any more than her fellow humans had ever been able to. She'd never given them the chance.

"Mom!" Phillip called from downstairs, and she bellowed back "Minute!" as she had always done.

And stood there, although she knew she should go downstairs, that she'd been here long enough, found everything worth finding. She stood

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staring out the windows across the room, listening to Phillip and Daniel moving around in the kitchen. I have to help Phillip with his homework, she thought, and it occurred to her that she had never known how to diagram sentences, because she'd copied her best friend's exam papers all through high school.

"Mom!" Phillip called, insistent. "Are you coming?"

Jeannine tucked the joint into her pocket, where neither Daniel nor Phillip would notice it. So he won't be able to have it, she thought, dig it out of the trash somehow. So he won't be able to get it back, if this changes. Shivering, she went downstairs, leaving the gerbils to scurry joyously through their sunlit tunnels. ●

ED WHITE, SPACEWALKING, JUNE 3, 1965

— A Modern Sonnet —

Rope played out from Gemini 4, slack
and twisted in its umbilical phase.
Shifting in the uterine drift,
he tumbled at a slothly pace;
while against the slate
black cloth of heaven, Earth rumbled
its plates—all azure glaze, sudsy soap.
He didn't scoff at chances of slipping off
to nowhere; fear was palpable enough
there. But he was first, two decades ago,
the thirst built-in for something new.
So he let himself turn, burning
with oxygen; as on his own mirror-bright
face, stars streaked in diamond light.

—Robert Frazier

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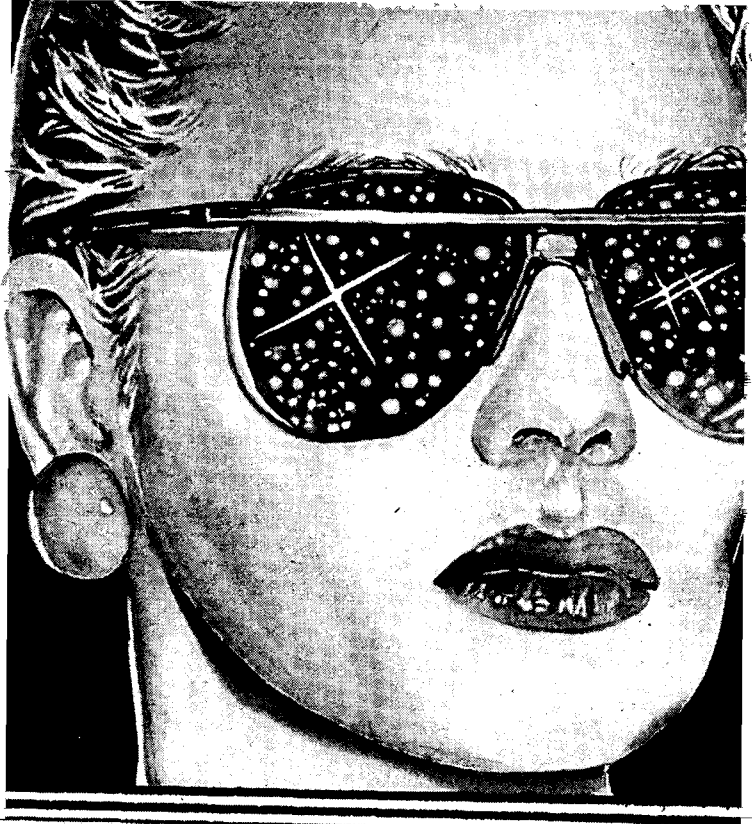

ON A HOT SUMMER NIGHT IN A PLACE FAR AWAY

by Pat Murphy

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art: Val Lakey Lindahn

The author says she often writes
stories about people who are out of place.
The protagonist of her first novel,
The Shadow Hunter, was a Neanderthal
who was brought to the present day.
Currently she is working on a novel
in which a modern archaeologist
must deal with the vagaries
of an ancient Mayan.
Ms. Murphy's short stories
have appeared in a number of anthologies
and magazines including *Universe 14*,
Year's Best Science Fiction (Dozois), *Galaxy*, and *IAsfm*.

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Gregorio is a hammock vendor in the ancient Mayan city of T'hoo, known to the Mexicans as Merida. He is a good salesman—*el mejor*, the best salesman of hammocks. He works in Parque Hidalgo and the Zocalo, T'hoo's main square, hailing tourists as they pass, calling in English, "Hey, you want to buy a hammock?"

Gregorio is short—only about five feet tall—but he is strong. His hands are strong and the nails are rimmed with purple from the plant dyes that he uses to tint the hammocks. Two of his front teeth are rimmed with gold. He is, most of the time, a good man. He was married once, and he has two little daughters who live far away in the village of Pixoy, near the city of Valladolid, on the other side of the Yucatan peninsula. Gregorio's wife threw him out because he drank too much and slept with other women. When she married another man, Gregorio left his village and travelled to Merida. He sold hammocks and lived in the nearby village of Tixkokob. Once, he went back to his village to visit his daughters, but they looked at him as if he were a stranger and they called the other man Papa. He did not go back to visit again.

Gregorio was sad when his wife threw him out, and he misses his village and his daughters, but he knows that drinking and sleeping with women does not make him a bad man. He has stopped drinking so much, but he has not stopped sleeping with women. He believes in moderation in virtue as well as vice.

Gregorio met the very thin woman in the sidewalk cafe beside the Parque Hidalgo. She was watching him bargain with an American couple: the bearded man in the Hawaiian shirt had been determined to get a good deal, and the bargaining took about an hour. Gregorio won, though the tourist never knew it: the final price was slightly higher than Gregorio's lowest, though lower than he would usually drop for a tourist. The gringo was pleased and Gregorio was pleased.

Gregorio noticed the woman when he was tying up his bundle of hammocks. She was a thin woman with pale blonde hair cropped close to her head and small breasts and long thin legs that she had stretched underneath the table. She held a notebook on her lap and a pen in one hand. She wore white pants and a white shirt and dark glasses that hid her eyes.

"Hey, you want to buy a hammock?"

She shook her head slightly. "No, *gracias*."

"*¿Porqué no*? Why not? You ever try sleeping in a hammock?"

"No." She was watching him, but he did not know what was going on behind the dark glasses. There was something strange about her face. The eyebrows, the cheekbones, the mouth—all looked fine. But there was something strange about the way that they were put together.

Gregorio set down his bundle of hammocks and looked around. It was

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late in the morning on a sunny Sunday. Chances were that most tourists were out visiting Uxmal or some other ancient site. He pulled out a chair. "OK if I rest here a while?"

She shrugged again, setting her notebook on the table. Her fingers, like her legs, were long and thin. Gregorio noticed that she wore no rings. And even though there was something strange about her face, she was a good-looking woman.

He whistled for the waiter and ordered cafe con leche, coffee with milk. When it came, he poured six teaspoons of sugar into the cup and sat back in the chair. "Where are you from?"

"Here and there," she said. And then, when he kept looking at her, "California, most recently. Los Angeles."

She did not act like a Californian—Californians talked too much and were very friendly—but he let that pass. "You on vacation?" he asked.

"More or less," she said. "Always a tourist."

They talked about the weather for a time, about Merida, about the surrounding ruins. Gregorio could not put this woman in a category. She did not seem like a tourist. She was not relaxed. Her long fingers were always busy—twisting the paper napkin into meaningless shapes, tapping on the table, tracing the lines of the checks on the tablecloth.

He asked her if she had been to visit Uxmal and Chichen Itza.

"Not this trip," she said. "I visited them before. A long time ago."

The church bell at the nearby church rang to call the people to noon mass; the pajaritos screamed in the trees. The woman sipped her cafe and stared moodily into the distance. She made him think of the tall storks that stand in the marshes near Progresso, waiting. He liked her: he liked her long legs and the small breasts that he knew must be hidden by her baggy shirt. He liked her silences and moodiness. Quiet women could be very passionate.

"You would sleep well in one of my hammocks," he said.

She smiled, an expression as fleeting as a hummingbird. "I doubt that."

"You will never know until you try it," he said. "Why don't you buy a hammock?"

"How much are your hammocks?"

Gregorio grinned. He quoted her his asking price, double the price he would accept. She bargained well. She seemed to know exactly when he was serious in his claim that he could accept no lower price, and she seemed, in a quiet way, to enjoy working him down to the lowest price he would accept. The hammock she bought was dyed a deep purple that shimmered in the sun.

Gregorio finished his coffee, hoisted his bundle of hammocks, and returned to work, hailing two blond gringos in university t-shirts. He lured them into a bargaining session before they realized what was what.

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* * *

Tourists stroll through the Zocalo, stare up at the cathedral built from the ancient stones of Mayan temples, admire the colonial architecture of the buildings in the city. Many regard the hammock vendors as pests, like the pigeons that coo and make messes on the lintel above the cathedral door. Many tourists are fools.

The hammock vendors know what happens in T'hoo. They are a select company: only thirty men sell hammocks on T'hoo's streets, though often it seems like much more. Each man carries a bundle of hammocks, neatly bound with a cord. Each man carries one hammock loose, using it as a cushion for the cord looped over his shoulder. When he hails a tourist, he stretches the loose hammock open wide so that the tropical sun catches in the bright threads and dazzles the eyes.

Hammock vendors live at a different tempo than the tourists. They sit in the shade and talk, knowing that the luck will come when the luck comes. They can't rush the luck. Sometimes, tourists buy. Sometimes, they do not. A hammock vendor can only wander in the Zocalo and wait for the luck to come.

While they are waiting, the hammock vendors watch people and talk. The French tourists who are staying at the Hotel Caribe will never buy a hammock: they bargain but never buy. There are pretty women among the Texans who have come to study Spanish at the University of the Yucatan, but all of them have boyfriends. The tall thin woman with pale hair is always awake very early and goes to her hotel very late.

"There she is," said Ricardo, looking up from the hammocks he was tying into a bundle. "She was in Restaurant Express last night until it closed. Drinking aguardiente." Gregorio glanced up to see the thin woman sitting at the same table as the day before. She had a lost look about her, as if she waited for a friend who had not come.

"She was here at seven this morning," observed Pich, a gray-haired, slow-moving hammock vendor. "She needs a man."

Ricardo looked sour and Gregorio guessed that he had suggested that to the thin woman the night before without success. The hammock vendors discussed the woman's probable needs for a time, then continued an earlier discussion of the boxing match to be held that evening. The woman was of passing interest only.

Still, when Gregorio wandered on to search for customers, he passed her table and said hello. Her notebook was on the table before her, but he could not read the writing. Not Spanish, but it did not look much like English either. Though the morning sun was not very bright, she wore the dark glasses, hiding her eyes behind them. *"Buenos días,"* she said to him. *"¿Qué tal?"*

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"Good," he said. He sat down at her table. "What are you writing?" He peered at the notebook on the table.

"Poetry," she said. "Bad poetry."

"What about?"

She glanced at the notebook. "Do you know the fairy tale about the princess who slept for a thousand years? I've written one about a woman who did not sleep for a thousand years."

"Why do you look so sad today? You are on vacation and the sun is shining."

She shrugged, the slightest movement of her shoulders. "I am tired of being on vacation," she said. "But I can't go home. I am waiting for my friends. They're going to meet me here."

"I understand." He knew what it was like to be homesick. She looked at him long and hard and he wondered about the color of her eyes behind her dark glasses. "Did you sleep in my hammock?" he asked her at last.

"I strung it in my hotel room."

"But you did not sleep in it?"

She shook her head. "No."

"Why not?"

She shrugged lightly. "I don't sleep."

"Not at all?"

"Not at all."

"Why not?"

"I slept at home," she said. "I can't sleep here."

"Bad dreams? I know a curandera who can help you with that. She'll mix you a powder that will keep bad dreams away."

She shook her head, a tiny denial that seemed almost a habit.

"Why not then? Why can't you sleep?"

She shrugged and repeated the head shake. "I don't know."

He stared at her face, wishing that she would remove her glasses. "What color are your eyes?" he asked.

She moved her sunglasses down on her nose and peered at him over the frames with eyes as violet as the sky at dusk. Her eyes were underlined with darkness. A little lost, a little wary. She replaced her sunglasses after only a moment.

"You don't sleep really?" Gregorio asked.

"Really."

"You need a man."

"I doubt that." Her tone was cool, distant, curious. It did not match the lost look in the violet eyes he had seen a moment before. She gestured at two American women taking a table at the other end of the cafe. "Those two look like they need a hammock," she said.

Gregorio went to sell them a hammock.

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Gregorio did not mention to the other hammock vendors that the thin woman did not sleep. Odd that he should forget to mention it—it was an interesting fact about a strange woman. Nevertheless, he forgot until he met her again, very late at night. He was wandering through the Zocalo, cursing his bad luck. He had missed the last bus to his village, Tixkakob, because he had taken a pretty young woman to the movies. But the young woman had declined to share her bed with him and he had no way home. He was in the Zocalo looking for a friend who might have a spot to hang a hammock.

He noticed the thin woman sitting alone on a bench, watching the stars. "What are you doing out here so late?" he asked.

She shrugged. "The cafes are closed. What are you doing here? All your customers have gone home."

He explained and she nodded thoughtfully and offered him a drink from the bottle of aguardiente that sat beside her on the bench. Aguardiente was a potent brandy and the bottle was half-empty. He sat beside her on the bench and drank deeply. With his foot, he nudged the paper bag that rested on the ground by her feet and it clinked: more bottles.

"I like this drink," she said slowly, her head tilted back to look at the stars. "It makes me feel warm. I am always cold here. I think, sometimes, if I found a place that was warm enough, then I would sleep."

The guitarists who serenaded tourists were putting away their instruments, grumbling a little at the evening's take. The Zocalo was almost deserted. Gregorio shifted uneasily on the bench. "I should go to Parque Hidalgo and see if Pich is still there. He would let me stay at his house."

"Keep me company a while," she said. "You can stay in my room." She glanced at him. "And don't bother looking at me like that. I plan to sit up by the hotel pool tonight. It's a good night to watch the stars." She leaned back to look at the night sky. "Tell me—have you always lived in Tixkokob?"

"I come from Pixoy. But it is better that I am not there now."

"Better for you." Her eyes were on the sky, but he felt vaguely uncomfortable, as if she were watching him closely.

"Better for everyone," he said.

"I understand," she said. She drank from the bottle and gave it back to him. They watched the moon rise.

Her room was on the bottom floor of the Hotel Reforma. It was a small dark room, very stuffy and hot. His hammock was strung from rings set in the walls. A stack of notebooks rested on the small table beside the bed. On the dresser, there was a strange small machine that looked a

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little like a cassette player, a little like a radio. "What's this?" he asked, picking it up.

She took it from his hand and set it gently back on the table. The aguardiente made her sway just a little, like a tall tree in the wind. "My lifeline. My anchor. And maybe an albatross around my neck."

Gregorio shook his head, puzzled by her answer, but unwilling to pursue it. The brandy was warm in his blood, and he was very close to deciding that the thin woman had invited him here because she wanted a man. He came close to her and wrapped his arms around her, leaning his head against her chest. He could feel her small breasts and that excited him.

She pushed him away with surprising strength and he fell back against the bed. She picked up her notebook and the strange small machine, tucked the bottle of aguardiente under her arm, and stepped toward the door. "Sleep," she said.

He slept badly. The tendrils of someone else's thoughts invaded his dreams. He wandered through a warm humid place where the light was the deep purple color of his hammock. The place was crowded with men and women as tall and thin as the thin woman. He asked them where he was, and they looked at him curiously with dark violet eyes. He wanted to go home, but when he asked if they could tell him the way, they said nothing. He was tired, very tired, but he could not rest in that place. The air was too thick and hot.

He woke, sweating, in the thin woman's room, and went to the patio to find her. The first light of dawn was touching the eastern sky, but stars were still visible overhead. She sat in a lounge chair beside the pool, speaking softly into the machine. He could not understand the words. Two empty aguardiente bottles were at her feet and another was on the table at her side. He sat in a chair beside her.

Fireflies were dancing over the pool. She gestured at the bottle that rested on the table and Gregorio saw that a firefly had blundered inside the bottle and seemed unable to find its way out. It crawled on the inside of the glass, its feeble light flickering. "I can't get her out," the woman said in a harsh voice blurred with brandy and filled with uncertainty. "And she can't find her way. She just keeps flashing her light, but no one answers. No one at all."

Without speaking, Gregorio took the bottle to the ornamental flower bed by the side of the pool. He took a brick from the border, lay the bottle on the cement, and tapped it lightly with the brick—once, twice, three times. A starburst of fine cracks spread from each place he struck the bottle, and when he pulled on the neck, the cracks separated and the bottle broke. The insect rose, sluggishly at first, then faster, dancing toward the other lights.

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She smiled, and he could tell that the brandy had affected her. The smile was slow and full, like a flower unfolding. "She returns to her place," the woman said, blinking at the dancing lights. "Sometimes I think that I have returned home and maybe I am asleep and dreaming of this place. Sometimes I try to think that. I go for days believing that I am asleep. Then I come to my senses and I know this is real." She reached for the last bottle, but it was empty.

"Where do you come from?" Gregorio asked.

She lifted one thin arm and pointed up at a bright spot of light high in the sky. "That one."

Gregorio looked at her and frowned. "Why are you here?"

She shrugged. "Merida is as good a place to wait as any. It's warm here, warmer than most places. My friends are supposed to come get me. They're late."

"How late?"

She looked down at her thin hands, now locked together in her lap. "Very late. Just over one hundred years now." Her hands twisted, one around the other. "Or maybe they never intended to come back. That's what bothers me. I send out reports regularly, and maybe that was all they wanted. Maybe they will leave me here forever."

"Forever?"

"Or for as long as I live." She glanced at him. In the light of the rising sun, he could see her strange violet eyes—wide and mournful. "I don't belong here. I don't . . ." She stopped and put her head in her hands. "Why are they so late? I want to go home." He did not understand what she said next—the language was not English and not Spanish. She was crying and he did not know what to say or do. She looked up at him with a face like an open wound. Her violet eyes were wet and the circles beneath them stood out like bruises. "I want to go home," she said again. "I don't belong here."

"Who are you?"

She closed her eyes for a moment and seemed to gather strength to her. "The explorers brought us here," she said. "The ones in the spacecraft. They left us to gather information about your people." She looked down for a moment and he thought she would stop talking, but she looked up again. "We travel with the explorers but we are a different people. When we meet with new ways, we adapt. We learn. We take on a little bit of the other, retaining a little bit of ourselves. We blend the two." She spread her hands on her knees. "We are diplomats, translators, go-betweens for merchants. We live on the border, neither fish nor fowl, not one thing and not the other." Her hands closed into fists. "There were three of us, but Mayra died two years ago. Seena, last year. We grew

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tired, so tired. They left us here too long. I have lost myself. I don't know who I am.

"I should not speak, but it has been so long." She shook her head and rubbed her eyes with her slender fingers. "You will forget this. I will make you forget." She leaned back in her chair and stared at the sky. The stars were gone now, washed out by the light of the rising sun. "I send them poetry instead of reports, but still they do not come for me. Maybe they don't care. Maybe none of this matters." Her voice had a high, ragged note of hysteria. "It did not bother me at first," she said. "Not while the others were alive. Only recently. It bothers me now. I would like to curl up and sleep for days. For weeks."

Gregorio took her long thin hand in his, squeezing it gently for comfort. This woman, she needed help. And he wanted her. She was aloof and foreign and he wanted to hold her. He wanted her because of her long thin legs, like a heron's legs, her long thin hands, like the cool hands of the Madonna.

He said nothing, but he was thinking of the place that the dream had brought to his mind, the dark, warm, limestone cavern just outside the nearby village of Homun. He had been thinking about seeing the thin woman naked, swimming in the waters of the cavern, alone with him.

She looked at his face and suddenly laughed, a small chuckle that seemed drawn from her against her will. "Sometimes, I can find my way out of my own self-pity, and I see you, son of the strange men who built those cities, goggling at me for . . . what? What do you want?" She stared at him, her violet eyes filled with amusement, then suddenly widening as if she were trying to see something in dim light. "Wait . . . where is this . . . this place . . . where?"

Her thin fingers were playing over his face as if searching for something. She reached out and ran a cool finger along the back of one hand. She had moved closer to him, her eyes wide and eager.

The quiet ones, he thought to himself. They are always the most passionate. And he imagined her clearly again, a long pale naked woman stepping into the warm water and smiling at him in invitation.

But she pulled back then, leaning back in her chair and slipping the dark glasses over her violet eyes, hiding behind the tinted lenses.

Later that day, Gregorio could not remember all that had happened out by the pool. He remembered the woman's hand in his; he remembered telling the woman that he would take her to the caves of Homun, to a very private cave he knew. But there was a curiously incomplete blurred feel to his memory.

Gregorio liked the woman, but he did not like the vague feeling that he was being tricked and he acted to prevent such a thing from happening

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again. In his right pocket, for clarity of mind, he carried a clear polished stone that had been thrice blessed with holy water. In his left, for good luck, he carried a jade bead that had been carved on one side with the face of Kin Ahau, the sun god who watches by day, and on the other side with the face of Akbal, the jaguar-headed god who watches by night. With these talismans he was confident. His mind would not be clouded.

The bus to Homun was hot and crowded. It dropped them on the edge of the village and Gregorio led the woman through the monte, the scrubby brush that covers much of the Yucatan, to the entrance to the cavern.

The Yucatan peninsula is riddled with limestone caverns that lead to deep dark places beneath the Earth. Here and there, the caves dip beneath the water table, forming subterranean pools. Gregorio knew of such a cave, a secluded subterranean pool that was a fine place to bring cute American tourists for seduction.

A tunnel led deep into the underworld to a pool of clear water in a limestone cave. Shells—all that remained of ancient clams and oysters—were embedded in the rock. Another tunnel, extending back from the first pool, led to an even more secluded pool.

Gregorio took the woman to the most remote pool. Stalactites hung low over the pool. The air was close and humid, very hot and moist. He carried a small flashlight and shone it on the limestone to show her the way. She was smiling now, following close behind him.

Gregorio strung his hammock on the two hooks that he had set in the limestone walls long ago. As soon as he had it strung, the woman sat on the edge of the hammock and then lay back with a soft sigh.

"We can swim," Gregorio said. He was quickly stripping off his clothing.

No reply from the woman in the hammock.

He went, naked, to the hammock. She was curled on her side, one hand tucked under her cheek, the other resting on her breast like a bird who has found her nest. Her eyes were closed and she breathed softly, gently, rhythmically. He touched her cheek, warm at last, brushing a stray tendril of hair back into place, and kissed her lightly. When he touched her, he felt a bright warm sensation, like the spreading warmth of brandy but quicker, cleaner, more pure. He saw in the darkness the tall thin people, holding out their long arms in welcome. He felt content and loved and very much at home.

He did not wake her. He swam alone in the warm water, dressed, and left her there, sleeping peacefully.

In a limestone cavern at Homun, a woman sleeps like a princess in a fairy tale. Gregorio knows she is there, but few others know the way to the hidden cave and if anyone does chance to find her, Gregorio knows

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that the person's mind will be clouded and he will forget. Gregorio visits her sometimes, touches her lightly on the cheek and feels the warm glow of homecoming. And he watches for the day when a tall thin man who does not sleep comes to town and sits in the cafes, sitting up late as if waiting for a friend. This one, Gregorio will take to the cavern to wake the woman who sleeps so soundly, wake her with a kiss and take her home. ●

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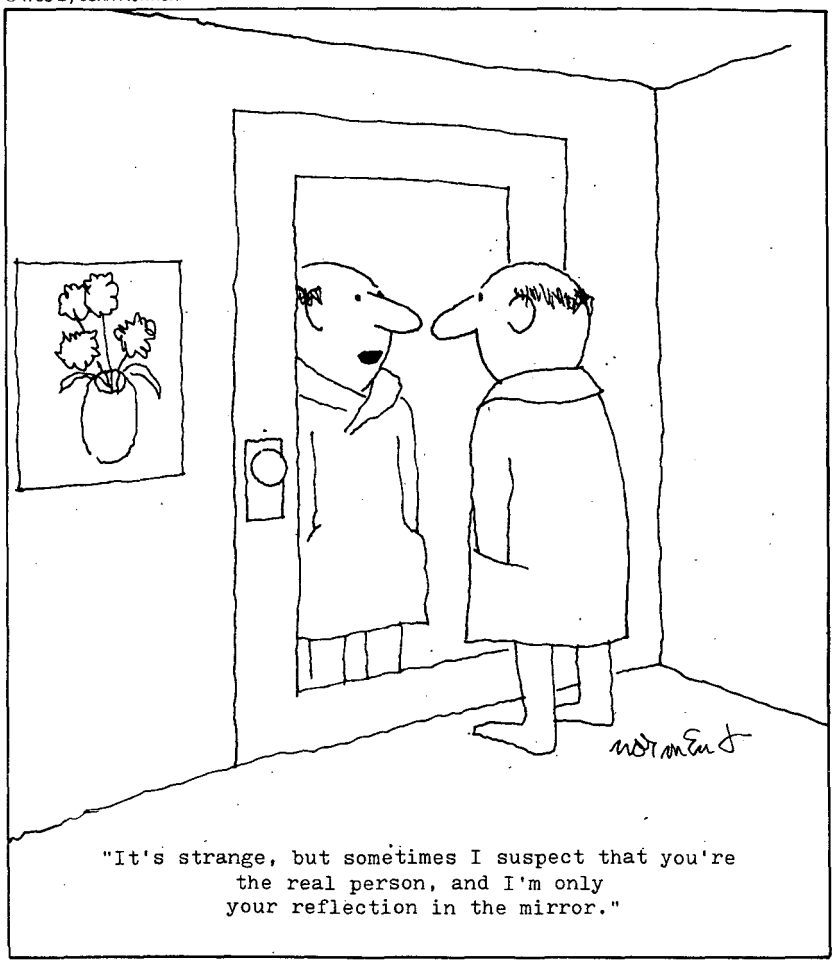

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A CLEAN ESCAPE

by John Kessel

art: Janet Aulisio

John Kessel recently sold his collaborative novel (written with James Patrick Kelly) to Blue Jay Books. He tells us that it will be titled a.) *Freedom Beach*, b.) *The Escapist*, c.) *Final Draft*, or d.) none of the above.

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"I've been thinking about devils. I mean if there are devils in the world, if there are people in the world who represent evil, is it our duty to exterminate them?"

John Cheever, "The Five-Forty-Eight"

As she sat in her office, waiting—for exactly what she did not know—Dr. Evans hoped that it wasn't going to be another bad day. She needed a cigarette and a drink. She swiveled the chair around to face the closed venetian blinds beside her desk, leaned back and laced her hands behind her head. She closed her eyes and breathed deeply. The air wafting down from the ventilator in the ceiling smelled of machine oil. It was cold. Her face felt it, but the bulky sweater kept the rest of her warm. Her hair felt greasy. Several minutes passed in which she thought of nothing. There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," she said absently.

Havelmann entered. He had the large body of an athlete gone slightly soft, thick, gray hair and a lined face. At first glance he didn't look sixty. His well-tailored blue suit badly needed pressing.

"Doctor?"

Evans stared at him for a moment. She would kill him. She looked down at the desk, rubbed her forehead with her hand. "Sit down," she said.

She took the pack of cigarettes from the desk drawer. "Would you care to smoke?"

The old man took one. She watched him carefully. His brown eyes were rimmed with red; they looked apologetic.

"I smoke too much," he said. "But I can't quit."

She gave him a light. "More people around here are quitting every day."

Havelmann exhaled smoothly. "What can I do for you?"

What can I do for *you*, sir.

"First, I want to play a little game." Evans took a handkerchief out of a pocket. She moved a brass paperweight, a small model of the Lincoln Memorial, to the center of the desk blotter. "I want you to watch what I'm doing, now."

Havelman smiled. "Don't tell me—you're going to make it disappear, right?"

She tried to ignore him. She covered the paperweight with the handkerchief. "What's under this handkerchief?"

"Can we put a little bet on it?"

"Not this time."

"A paperweight."

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"That's wonderful." Evans leaned back with finality. "Now I want you to answer a few questions."

The old man looked around the office curiously: at the closed blinds, at the computer terminal and keyboard against the wall, at the pad of switches in the corner of the desk. His eyes came to rest on the mirror opposite the window. "That's a two-way mirror."

Evans sighed. "No kidding."

"Are you recording this?"

"Does it matter to you?"

"I'd like to know. Common courtesy."

"Yes, we're being videotaped. Now answer the questions."

Havelmann seemed to shrink in the face of her hostility. "Sure."

"How do you like it here?"

"It's O.K. A little boring. A man couldn't even catch a disease here, from the looks of it, if you know what I mean. I don't mean any offense, doctor. I haven't been here long enough to get the feel of the place."

Evans rocked slowly back and forth. "How do you know I'm a doctor?"

"Aren't you a doctor? I thought you were. This is a hospital, isn't it? So I figured when they sent me in to see you you must be a doctor."

"I am a doctor. My name is Evans."

"Pleased to meet you, Dr. Evans."

She would kill him. "How long have you been here?"

The man tugged on his earlobe. "I must have just got here today. I don't think it was too long ago. A couple of hours. I've been talking to the nurses at their station."

What she wouldn't give for three fingers of Jack Daniels. She looked at him over the steeple of her fingers. "Such talkative nurses."

"I'm sure they're doing their jobs."

"I'm sure. Tell me what you were doing before you came to this . . . hospital."

"You mean right before?"

"Yes."

"I was working."

"Where do you work?"

"I've got my own company—ITG Computer Systems. We design programs for a lot of people. We're close to getting a big contract with Ma Bell. We swing that and I can retire by the time I'm forty—if Uncle Sam will take his hand out of my pocket long enough for me to count my change."

Evans made a note on her pad. "Do you have a family?"

Havelmann looked at her steadily. His gaze was that of an earnest young college student, incongruous on a man of his age. He stared at her as if he could not imagine why she would ask him these abrupt

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questions. She detested his weakness; it raised in her a fury that pushed her to the edge of insanity. It was already a bad day, and it would get worse.

"I don't understand what you're after," Havelman said, with considerable dignity. "But just so your record shows the facts: I've got a wife, Helen, and two kids. Ronnie's nine and Susan's five. We have a nice big house and a Lincoln and a Porsche. I follow the Braves and I don't eat quiche. What else would you like to know?"

"Lots of things. Eventually I'll find them out." Evans' voice was cold. "Is there anything you'd like to ask me? How you came to be here? How long you're going to have to stay? Who you are?"

His voice went similarly cold. "I know who I am."

"Who are you, then?"

"My name is Robert Havelmann."

"That's right," Doctor Evans said calmly. "What year is it?"

Havelmann watched her warily, as if he were about to be tricked. "What are you talking about? It's 1984."

"What time of year?"

"Spring."

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-five."

"What do I have under this handkerchief?"

Havelmann looked at the handkerchief on the desk as if noticing it for the first time. His shoulders tightened and he looked suspiciously at Evans.

"How should I know?"

He was back again that afternoon, just as rumpled, just as innocent. How could a person get old and still be innocent? She could not remember things ever being that easy. "Sit down," she said.

"Thanks. What can I do for you, doctor?"

"I want to follow up on the argument we had this morning."

Havelmann smiled. "Argument? This morning?"

"Don't you remember talking to me this morning?"

"I never saw you before."

Evans watched him coolly. The old man shifted in his chair.

"How do you know I'm a doctor?"

"Aren't you a doctor? They told me I should go in to see Dr. Evans in room 10."

"I see. If you weren't here this morning, where were you?"

Havelmann hesitated.

"Let's see—I was at work. I remember telling Helen—the wife—that I'd try to get home early. She's always ragging me because I stay late.

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The company's pretty busy right now: big contract in the works. Susan's in the school play, and we have to be there by eight. And I want to get home soon enough before then to do some yardwork. It looked like a good day for it."

Evans made a note. "What season is it?"

Havelmann fidgeted like a child, looked at the window, where the blinds were still closed.

"Spring," he said. "Sunny, warm—very nice weather. The redbuds are just starting to come out."

Without a word Evans got out of her chair and went to the window. She opened the blinds, revealing a barren field swept with drifts of snow. Dead grass whipped in the strong wind and the sky roiled with clouds.

"What about this?"

Havelmann stared. His back straightened and he leaned forward. He tugged at his earlobe.

"Isn't that a bitch. If you don't like the weather here—wait ten minutes."

"What about the redbuds?"

"This weather will probably kill them. I hope Helen made the kids wear their jackets."

Evans looked out the window. Nothing had changed. She slowly drew the blinds and sat down again.

"What year is it?"

Havelmann adjusted himself in his chair, calm again. "What do you mean? It's 1984."

"Did you ever read that book?"

"Slow down a minute. What are you talking about?"

Evans wondered what he would do if she got up and ground her thumbs into his eyes. "The book by George Orwell titled *1984*." She forced herself to speak slowly. "Are you familiar with it?"

"Sure. We had to read it in college." Was there a trace of irritation beneath Havelmann's innocence? Evans sat as silently and as still as she could.

"I remember it made quite an impression on me," Havelmann continued.

"What kind of impression?"

"I expected something different from the professor. He was a confessed liberal. I expected some kind of bleeding heart book. It wasn't like that at all."

"Did it make you uncomfortable?"

"No. It didn't tell me anything I didn't know already. It just showed what was wrong with collectivism. You know—Communism represses the individual, destroys initiative. It claims it has the interests of the

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majority at heart. And it denies all human values. That's what I got out of *1984*, though to hear that professor talk about it, it was all about Nixon and Vietnam."

Evans kept still. Havelmann went on.

"I've seen the same mentality at work in business. The large corporations, they're just like the government. Big, slow: you could show them a way to save a billion, and they'd squash you like a bug because it's too much trouble to change."

"You sound like you've got some resentments," said Evans.

The old man smiled. "I do, don't I. I admit it. I've thought a lot about it. But I have faith in people. Someday I may just run for state assembly and see whether I can do some good."

Her pencil point snapped. She looked at Havelmann, who looked back at her. After a moment she focused her attention on the notebook. The broken point had left a black scar across her precise handwriting.

"That's a good idea," she said quietly, her eyes still lowered. "You still don't remember arguing with me this morning?"

"I never saw you before I walked in this door. What were we supposed to be fighting about?"

He was insane. Evans almost laughed aloud at the thought—of course he was insane—why else would he be there? The question, she forced herself to consider rationally, was the nature of his insanity. She picked up the paperweight and handed it across to him. "We were arguing about this paperweight," she said. "I showed it to you, and you said you'd never seen it before."

Havelmann examined the paperweight. "Looks ordinary to me. I could easily forget something like this. What's the big deal?"

"You'll note that it's a model of the Lincoln Memorial."

"You probably got it at some gift shop. D.C. is full of junk like that."

"I haven't been to Washington in a long time."

"I live there. Alexandria, anyway. I drive in every morning."

Evans closed her notebook. "I have a possible diagnosis of your condition," she said suddenly.

"What condition?"

This time the laughter was harder to repress. Tears almost came to her eyes with the effort. She caught her breath and continued. "You exhibit the symptoms of Korsakov's syndrome. Have you ever heard of that before?"

Havelmann looked as blank as a whitewashed wall. "No."

"Korsakov's syndrome is an unusual form of memory loss. Recorded cases go back to the late 1800s. There was a famous one in the 1970s—famous to doctors, I mean. A Marine sergeant named Arthur Briggs. He was in his fifties, in good health aside from the lingering

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effects of alcoholism, and had been a career noncom until his discharge in the mid-sixties after twenty years in the service. He'd functioned normally until the early seventies, when he lost his memory of any events which occurred to him after September, 1944. He could remember in vivid detail, as if they had just happened, events up until that time. But of the rest of his life—nothing. Not only that, his continuing memory was affected so that he could remember events that occurred in the present only for a period of minutes, after which he would forget totally."

"I can remember what happened to me right up until I walked into this room."

"That's what Sgt. Briggs told his doctors. To prove it he told them that World War II was going strong, that he was stationed in San Francisco in preparation for being sent to the Philippines, that it looked like the St. Louis Browns might finally win a pennant if they could hold on through September, and that he was twenty years old. He had the outlook and abilities of an intelligent twenty-year-old. He couldn't remember anything that happened to him longer than forty minutes. The world had gone on, but he was permanently stuck in 1944."

"That's horrible."

"So it seemed to the doctor in charge—at first. Later he speculated that it might not be so bad. The man still had a current emotional life. He could still enjoy the present; it just didn't stick with him. He could remember his youth, and for him his youth had never ended. He never aged; he never saw his friends grow old and die, he never remembered that he himself had grown up to be a lonely alcoholic. His girlfriend was still waiting for him back in Columbia, Missouri. He was twenty years old forever. He had made a clean escape."

Evans opened a desk drawer and took out a hand mirror. "How old are you?" she asked.

Havelmann looked frightened. "Look, why are we doing—"

"How old are you?" Evans' voice was quiet but determined. Inside her a pang of joy threatened to break her heart.

"I'm thirty-five. What the hell—"

Shoving the mirror at him was as satisfying as firing a gun. Havelmann took it, glanced at her, then tentatively, like the most nervous of college freshmen checking the grade on his final exam, looked at his reflection. "Jesus Christ," he said. He started to tremble.

"What happened? What did you do to me?" He got out of the chair, his expression contorted. "What did you do to me! I'm thirty-five! What happened?"

Dr. Evans stood in front of the mirror in her office. She was wearing her uniform. It was quite as rumpled as Havelmann's suit. She had the

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tunic unbuttoned and was feeling her left breast. She lay down on the floor and continued the examination. The lump was undeniable. No pain, yet.

She sat up, reached for the pack of cigarettes on the desktop, fished out the last one and lit it. She crumpled the pack and threw it at the wastebasket. Two points. She had been quite a basketball player in college, twenty years before. She lay back down and took a long drag on the cigarette, inhaling deeply, exhaling the smoke with force, with a sigh of exhaustion. She probably could not make it up and down the court a single time any more.

She turned her head to look out the window. The blinds were open, revealing the same barren landscape that showed before. There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," she said.

Havelmann entered. He saw her lying on the floor, raised an eyebrow, grinned. "You're Doctor Evans?"

"I am."

"Can I sit here or should I lie down too?"

"Do whatever you fucking well please."

He sat in the chair. He had not taken offense. "So what did you want to see me about?"

Evans got up, buttoned her tunic, sat in the swivel chair. She stared at him. Her face was blank, pale, her thin lips steady. It was the expression of a woman terminally ill, so accustomed to her illness, and the necessity of ignoring it, that all that showed of the pain was mild annoyance. I am going to see this through, her face said, and then I'm going to kill myself.

"Have we ever met before?" she asked.

"No. I'm sure I'd remember."

He was sure he would remember. She would fucking kill him. He would remember that.

She ground out the last inch of cigarette. She felt her jaw muscles tighten; she looked down at the ashtray in regret. "Now I have to quit."

"I should quit. I smoke too much myself."

"I want you to listen to me closely now," she said slowly. "Do not respond until I'm finished.

"My name is Major D.S. Evans and I am a military psychologist. This office is in the infirmary of NECDEC, the National Emergency Center for Defense Communications, located one thousand feet below a hillside in West Virginia. As far as we know we are the only surviving governmental body in the continental United States. The scene you see through this window is being relayed from a surface monitor in central Nebraska;

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by computer command I can connect us with any of the twelve monitors still functioning on the surface."

Evans turned to her keyboard and typed in a command; the scene through the window snapped to a shot of broken masonry and twisted steel reinforcement rods. The view was obscured by dust caked on the camera lens and by a heavy snowfall. Evans typed in an additional command and touched one of the switches on her desk. A blast of static, a hiss like frying bacon, came from a speaker.

"That's Dallas. The sound is a reading of the background radiation registered by detectors at the site of this camera." She typed in another command and the image on the "window" flashed through a succession of equally desolate scenes, holding ten seconds on each before switching to the next. A desert in twilight, motionless under low clouds; a murky underwater shot in which the remains of a building were just visible; a denuded forest half-buried in snow; a deserted highway overpass. With each change of scene the loudspeaker stopped for a split-second, then the hiss resumed.

Havelmann watched all of this soberly.

"This has been the state of the surface for a year now, ever since the last bombs fell. To our knowledge there are no human beings alive in North America—in the Northern Hemisphere, for that matter. Radio transmissions from South America, New Zealand and Australia have one by one ceased in the last eight months. We have not observed a living creature above the level of an insect through any of our monitors since the beginning of the year. It is the summer of 2010. Although, considering the situation, counting years by the old system seems a little futile to me."

Doctor Evans slid open a desk drawer and took out an automatic. She placed it in the middle of the desk blotter and leaned back, her right hand touching the edge of the desk, near the gun.

"You are now going to tell me that you never heard of any of this, and that you've never seen me before in your life," she said. "Despite the fact that I have been speaking to you daily for two weeks and that you have had this explanation from me at least three times during that period. You are going to tell me that it is 1984 and that you are thirty-five years old, despite the absurdity of such a claim. You are going to feign amazement and confusion; the more that I insist that you face these facts, the more you are going to become distressed. Eventally you will break down into tears and expect me to sympathize. You can go to hell."

Evans' voice had grown angrier as she spoke. She had to stop; it was almost more than she could do. When she resumed she was under control again. "If you persist in this sham, I may kill you. I assure you that no one will care if I do. You may speak now."

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Havelmann stared at the window. His mouth opened and closed stupidly. How old he looked, how feeble. Evans felt a sudden wave of pity and doubt. What if she were wrong? She had an image of herself as she might appear to him: arrogant, bitter, an incomprehensible inquisitor whose motives for tormenting him were a total mystery. She watched him. After a few minutes his mouth closed; the eyes blinked rapidly and were clear.

"Please. Tell me what you're talking about."

Evans shuddered. "The gun is loaded. Keep talking."

"What do you want me to say? I never heard of any of this. Only this morning I saw my wife and kids and everything was all right. Now you give me this story about atomic war and 2010. What, have I been asleep for thirty years?"

"You didn't act very surprised to be here when you walked in. If you're so disoriented, how do you explain how you got here?"

The man sat heavily in the chair. "I don't remember. I guess I thought I came here—to the hospital, I thought—to get a checkup. I didn't think about it. You must know how I got here."

"I do. But I think you know too, and you're just playing a game with me—with all of us. The others are worried, but I'm sick of it. I can see through you, so you may as well quit the act. You were famous for your sincerity, but I always suspected that was an act, too, and I'm not falling for it. You didn't start this game soon enough for me to be persuaded you're crazy, despite what the others may think."

Evans played with the butt of her dead cigarette. "Or this could be a delusional system," she continued. "You think you're in a hospital, and your schizophrenia has progressed to the point where you deny all facts that don't go along with your attempts to evade responsibility. I suppose in some sense such an insanity would absolve you. If that's the case, I should be more objective. Well, I can't. I'm failing my profession, I realize. Too bad." Emotion had gradually drained away from her until, by the end, she felt as if she were speaking from across a continent instead of a desk.

"I still don't know what you're talking about. Where are my wife and kids?"

"They're dead."

Havelmann sat rigidly. The only sound was the hiss of the radiation detector. "Let me have a cigarette."

"There are no cigarettes left. I just smoked my last one." Evans' voice was distant. "I made two cartons last a year."

Havelmann's gaze dropped. "How old my hands are! . . . Helen has lovely hands."

"Why are you going on with this charade?"

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The old man's face reddened. "God damn you! Tell me what happened!"

"The famous Havelmann rage. Am I supposed to be frightened now?"

The hiss from the loudspeaker seemed to increase. Havelmann lunged for the gun. Evans snatched it and pushed back from the desk. The old man grabbed the paperweight and raised it to strike. She pointed the gun at him.

"Your wife didn't make the plane in time. She was at the western White House. I don't know where your damned kids were—probably vaporized with their own families. You, however, had Operation Kneecap to save you. Mr. President. Now sit down and tell me why you've been playing games, or I'll kill you right here and now. Sit down!"

A light seemed to dawn on Havelmann. "You're insane," he said quietly.

"Put the paperweight back on the desk."

He did. He sat.

"But you can't simply be crazy," Havelmann continued. "There's no reason why you should take me away from my home and subject me to this. This is some kind of plot. The government. The CIA."

"And you're thirty-five years old?"

Havelmann examined his hands again. "You've done something to me."

"And the camps? Administrative Order 31?"

"If I'm the President, then why are you quizzing me here? Why can't I remember a thing about it?"

"Stop it. Stop it right now," Evans said slowly. She heard her voice for the first time. It sounded more like that of an old man than Havelmann's. "I can't take any more lies. I swear that I'll kill you. First it was the commander-in-chief routine, calisthenics, stiff upper lips and discipline. Then the big brother, let's have a whiskey and talk it over, son. Yessir, Mr. President." Havelmann stared at her. He was going to make her kill him, and she knew she wouldn't be strong enough not to.

"Now you can't remember anything," she said. "Your boys are confused, they're fed up. I'm fed up, too."

"If this is true, you've got to help me!"

"I don't give a rat's ass about helping you!" Evans shouted. "I'm interested in making you tell the truth. Don't you realize that we're dead? I don't care about your feeble sense of what's right and wrong; just tell me what's keeping you going. Who do you think you're going to impress? You think you've got an election to win? A place in history to protect? There isn't going to be any more history! History ended last August!

"So spare me the fantasy about the hospital and the nonexistent nurses' station. Someone with Korsakov's wouldn't make up that story. He would

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recognize the difference between a window and a projection screen. A dozen other slips. You're not a good enough actor."

Her hand trembled. The gun was heavy. Her voice trembled, too, and she despised herself for it. "Sometimes I think the only thing that's kept me alive is knowing I had half a pack of cigarettes left. That and the desire to make you crawl."

The old man sat looking at the gun in her hand. "I was the president?"

"No," said Evans bitterly, "I made it all up."

His eyes seemed to sink farther back in the network of lines surrounding them.

"I started a war?"

Evans felt her heart race. "Stop lying! You sent the strike force; you ordered the pre-emptive launch."

"I'm old. How old am I?"

"You know damn well how—" she stopped. She could hardly catch her breath. She felt a sharp pain in her breast. "You're sixty-one."

"Jesus, Mary, Joseph."

"That's it? That's all you can say?"

The old man stared hollowly, then slowly, so slowly that at first it was not apparent what he was doing, he lowered his head into his hands and began to cry. His sobs were almost inaudible over the hissing of the radiation detector. Dr. Evans watched him intently. She rested her elbows on the desk, steadying the gun with both hands. Havelmann's head shook in front of her. Despite his age, his gray hair was thick.

After a moment Evans reached over and switched off the loudspeaker. The hissing stopped.

Eventually Havelmann stopped crying. He raised his head. He looked dazed. His expression became unreadable. He looked at the doctor and the gun.

"My name is Robert Havelmann," he said. "Why are you pointing that gun at me?"

"Please don't," said Evans.

"Don't what? Who are you?"

Evans watched his face blur. Through her tears he looked like a much younger man. The gun drooped. She tried to lift it, but it was as if she were made of smoke—there was no substance to her, and it was all she could do to keep from dissipating, let alone kill anyone as clean and innocent as Robert Havelmann. He took the gun from her hand. "Are you all right?" he asked.

Dr. Evans sat in her office, hoping that it wasn't going to be a bad day. The pain in her breast had not come that day, but she was out of cigarettes. She searched the desk on the odd chance that she might have

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missed a pack, even a single butt, in the corner of one of the drawers. No luck.

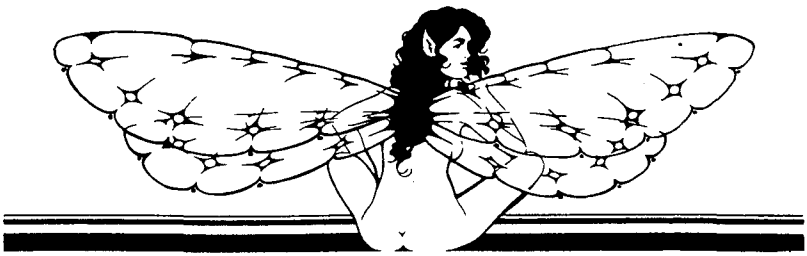
She gave up and turned to face the window. The blinds were open, revealing the snow-covered field. She watched the clouds roll before the wind. It was dark. Winter. Nothing was alive

"It's cold outside," she whispered.

There was a knock at the door. Dear God, leave me alone, she thought. Please leave me alone.

"Come in," she said.

The door opened and an old man in a rumpled suit entered. "Dr. Evans? I'm Robert Havelmann. What did you want to talk about?" ●



NEXT ISSUE

Our June cover story, "Tunicate, Tunicate, Wilt Thou Be Mine?," is a dark tale by Charles Sheffield set in the depths of Africa. Our Viewpoint is a stimulating response, by Norman Spinrad, to this month's article on characterization by Isaac Asimov. It's too soon to say which of our other stories will make up June's contents, but we do have exciting works in our inventory by Damon Knight, James Patrick Kelly, James Sallis, and others. Look for a copy of this issue on May 7, 1985.

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ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

In the Drift
By Michael Swanwick
Ace, $2.95 (paper)

We open in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia?

I can't really think of *any* SF novels that open in (or take place in, for that matter) Philadelphia. Somehow, pleasant and cultured city though it is, Philadelphia seems a very *unspeculative* sort of place. However, one forgets one aspect of the city of brotherly love. It lies downwind of a certain nuclear site in Pennsylvania, scene of some little national scrutiny a couple of years ago.

Therein lies the core concept of Michael Swanwick's *In the Drift*, a collection of five stories (two so minor as to be simply linking material) that take place in the same environment and, to a degree, chronicle the life and career of one Keith Piotrowicz, a native of Philadelphia.

Keith's Philadelphia is not pleasant or cultured or brotherly loving, either. As it's first described, the reader might guess that this is yet *another* dreary postholocaust future, but clues rapidly point out that that's not quite the case. For one thing, the event (of some generations ago) that triggered the (partial) breakdown of civilization is referred to as "Meltdown." For another, Philadelphia lies on the eastern border of a large area called "The Drift." A radiation-haunted wasteland, it divides the Green State Alliance (once New England) from what's left of the United States.

The Drift is sparsely inhabited by the remnants of refugee hordes, who survive (sort of) by wearing nucleopore masks. They are subject to endless varieties of mutation, radiation sicknesses, and mutated diseases; their life expectancy is 22.3 years. The Drift also contains all sorts of mutated flora and fauna, particularly insects (with short generations, they have lots of chances to develop new species).

Philadelphia technically lies outside the Drift, but is subject to much of its perils. Law and order has, by default, fallen into the hands of the Mummers, loosely organized clubs dating from the 19th century when they were organized to provide bands and floats for the traditional New Year's Day parade (something like the Mardi Gras crews of New Orleans); they were the only stable elements in the anarchy prevailing after Meltdown.

Keith is introduced as a youth,

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a have-not outside the Mummers' political structure; involvement with an outsider researching the Drift results in ejection from the city and a harrowing trek through the Drift, and the eventual discovery of a fact which gains him ingress to Philadelphia's power structure.

The next major episode is built around Sam(antha), a "vampire" mutation (born with short bowel syndrome and deriving nourishment only from blood), who can "see" radiation; she becomes involved with, and betrayed by, Keith, who has become a major political figure. And finally there is Vicki, Sam's daughter, leading a rebellion of the Drift's pathetic inhabitants against takeover by the U.S. *or* the Green State Alliance.

There are some things one might quibble with in *In the Drift*: the parts don't really add up to a whole greater than themselves. The book ends up something of a patchwork. There's a touch of paranormal mysticism toward the end which is a little jarring and the "climax" seems somewhat melodramatically contrived.

But these probably loom larger than they might because on the whole the book is so intelligently done, well thought out, and well written.

One might also quibble, incidentally, with the quote from Heinlein used by Swanwick as an introductory citation: "There will always be survivors." Oh?

The Faces of Science Fiction
Photographed by Patti Perret
Bluejay, $35.00, $11.95 (paper)

The science fiction community, like most fields of endeavor, is not known for its style and looks. Science fiction writers resemble most other folks, except sometimes, it seems, they're a little scruffier. Therefore the idea of a book of photographs of SF writers filled me with a great rush of ennui, as something fit only to have fun with, if one were feeling particularly waspish, or for fans to find out what Algernon P. McBem, writer, *really* looks like.

Well, *The Faces of Science Fiction* as photographed by Patti Perret is truly a surprise. Oh, the writers are no more a collection of Pierce Brosnans or Jaclyn Smiths than one might expect. But the factors that one *didn't* expect are several: that Patti Perret is an extraordinarily good photographer; that she tracked the writers to their lairs and photographed them (mostly) in or around their homes; and that there is no written gush of stuff (aside from some informative front matter) except a minimal statement from each writer with each photo.

The combination of the above make for a collection of extraordinarily revealing pictures; so revealing that one wonders if the innocent authors (usually a shy lot save for the public—sometimes unfortunate—faces put on at conventions and such) really knew what

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they were getting into. Their clothes, expressions and surroundings say an enormous lot to Perret's camera, which is not cruel but certainly informative. Add to this the writers' own statements; they were apparently given a great deal of leeway, but what usually emerges is some kind of philosophy from which even more can be read. (Cagey Ursula Le Guin gives an oblique poem, however.)

The opportunity for comment is endless, but reviewers are usually close enough to assassination without giving opinions on authors' pictures. However, perhaps a few judicious examples will give an idea of the book. There is an extraordinarily lovely picture of C.L. Moore in her arbor. The photograph of Charles Sheffield could have come straight from the back of an old pulp magazine, in the period when the liquor ads were featuring "The Man of Distinction." Frank Herbert sits over a *dry* swimming pool. David Gerrold does a macabre number on his dog in his remarks, but the little one almost dominates the picture, with biscuits. The De Camps belie their ages (together 47 years, they've been), seated on what looks to be an amazingly uncomfortable sofa.

Thomas M. Disch is coyly reflected in the side of an electric toaster (maybe the book's one lapse into cuteness). Robert Silverberg sprawls on the only bed to be featured in the volume.

And handsomeness is hardly lacking, if your concern is purely what people look like. C.J. Cherryh's mother could well have been frightened by an early Elizabeth Taylor movie, to judge from this photograph. Jeffrey A. Carver can only be described by the word "hunk." Perhaps the greatest revelation is the photograph of the rarely photographed Alice Sheldon, aka James Tiptree, Jr. One knew she had talent. One knew (from correspondence) that she was gracious. It was more than might be expected that she has the kind of ageless, high fashion beauty that makes Lauren Bacall look downright dowdy in comparison. Life is unfair.

There are also generalities to be played with. Present in the sum of the photographs (80 or so) are a great many dogs, fewer cats, a lot of computers, a lot of books, and evidence of compulsive clutter and compulsive neatness.

The selection is hardly comprehensive. Some authors live too far afield to be tracked down, or were unavailable for other reasons (which they might well regret, once having seen the book). And I'm certainly not suggesting that it's a dead giveaway to the total psyches of the subjects. But the clues are many and intriguing.

(For the record, I might note that while I've met perhaps fifty percent of the people pictured, I only know or have known four of them intimately enough to feel that I am bringing any sort of personal bias to their photographs. And from

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those I can judge just how good the others are.)

This is not a book to browse through quickly at your local bookshop. If you do, you're missing a great deal.

Time Piper
By Delia Huddy
Tempo, $2.25 (paper)

One of the first things one is taught at the Pluck, Luck, and Hard Knocks College of Book Reviewing is that one does not begin a review with—aaargh. Nevertheless . . .

Aaargh.

(Such a succinct way to express dismay.)

Delia Huddy's *Time Piper* is so neatly done for most of its length that when it doesn't come off at the end, one is quite honestly upset.

It's another of those ambigenerational SF novels that could be viewed as a juvenile (mainly because it has an adolescent protagonist). On the other hand, it is from that particular school of young people's fiction that is so realistically observed (both in characters and milieu) that it achieves a quite real maturity of style that puts a lot of "adult" fiction to shame. The British seem particularly good at this (Mayne and Garner come to mind), with none of the stiff, "nice" qualities that American editors seem to feel is necessary for adolescent reading.

Young Luke lives with his family in a small village near London. He is taking a rest at home before entering university, to which he has won a scholarship. He becomes aware of a new girl in the next village, already ostracized because she is "different"—he, in fact, rescues her from a gang of yobs (lovely English expression—it means, of course, backward boys, i.e. delinquents), and finds out only that she calls herself Hare.

Restless at home, he gets a job with an extraordinary multinational scientific project in London, through pure luck (and the strength of his scholarship). The project has to do with experiments with time, particularly involving tachyons and forward and backward time. Luke moves to London and is surprised to see Hare there. Feeling some pity for the girl, whose mistreatment in the village has disturbed him, he finds that she is living in an abandoned house; to his surprise, she has joined others like herself, all of whom seem to be runaway adolescents with an indefinable air of difference. Even more mysteriously, they seem to be intensely concerned with the project on which he is working.

Comes the climax; the great experiment takes place at the lab, using the full capacity of most of London's power stations. The tachyon "time machine" zeros in on a past time in Germany; it, in essence (I guess), "captures" a group of children (in essence, apparently), thereby laying the basis for the legend for the Pied Piper of Hamlin.

Certainly not a bad idea. But

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Huddy just doesn't bring it off. There's a lot of talk about "souls" and no clear reason how the contemporary young people link up with their ancient equivalents. This is the more infuriating because all the preceding narrative has been so expert, from the English village milieu and intra-family wrangling to the slapdash, chaotic atmosphere of a thrown-together scientific project on the track of a breakthrough.

One is not supposed to end a review with aaargh, either.

Quarreling, They Met the Dragon
By Sharon Baker
Avon, $2.95 (paper)

Let's consider pornography.

For one thing, it's at least partially in the eye of the beholder. (One is tempted to use the expression that ends " . . . another man's poison," but that could smack of vulgarity in the current context.) For another, it has to do with the intent of the author, sometimes unknowable.

Therefore, it's a very sticky matter (as it were) to label a work pornographic. But if Sharon Baker's *Quarreling, They Met the Dragon* isn't, it comes awfully close.

It's not all that explicit, sexually, for the most part. What raises the question is its almost total preoccupation *with* sex, which seems to enter almost every page, and be the main concern of almost every character. Now this post-Freudian age knows the importance of the subject, but there are other things in life—even in fiction. There is also the matter that the sex in this book is often not very pleasant. It is associated with rape, blood, beating, death, and that general connection of sex and violence which is such an unfortunate subcurrent of our society.

It has to do with the society of the planet, Naphar, which is big on slavery. Slave boy Senruh is a marketable commodity in the bazaar of its major city, Qaqqadum, and is used—and ill used—by what seems to be half the population. He is often rented by an antique lady who apparently gets her kicks by torturing her household staff to death, preferably with them begging her to continue while they're still wriggling. She eventually throws Senruh to her litter bearers for a public rape, which is just about the Last Straw for our sensitive hero.

He resolves to make for the enclave of the Spacers, who reportedly don't go in for such goings-on. With another fugitive, he slaughters several city guards, and is pursued across the countryside by the blood(and sex-)thirsty soldiery (male and female); the two, even while scuttling from one hiding place to another, spend most of their time quibbling about whether they should have sex or not (there are social and philosophical differences). And when they eventually reach the refuge of the Spacer community, which is technically knowledgeable and civilized and doing a lot of research on the so-

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ciology of Naphar, guess what's on everybody's mind?

Not the Napharian economy, that's for sure.

The curious thing about this novel is that there *is* an underpinning of real science fictional thinking; Naphar could be an authentically constructed alien society if less time and energy were devoted to the sexual side of things. The field has sometimes been subject to exploitation in the matter of violence (all those swell post-holocaust futures full of death and destruction), but almost never with sexuality. Maybe it's just a new manifestation of the sleaze factor that we heard so much about in the last election.

(Incidentally, in the acknowledgments at the end of the book, the author thanks, among many others, Gene Wolfe and "hustlers past and present who agreed to interviews.")

Pure Blood
By Mike McQuay
Bantam, $2.95 (paper)

In this one, we open in Albany.

Albany?

Or, more correctly, Mike McQuay in *Pure Blood* calls it Alb'ny. This community is on the great river Hus, and is in the territory of N'ork; it's not too far from Kipsie and Schneck.

Yes, it's another neo-barbarian era, a millennium in the future. The cause this time is the greenhouse effect, and New York can be said to be a jungle with no fear of contradiction; the environment makes Tarzan's turf look like the steppes. There are constant deluges of rain and subsequent floods; crops are raised on fields that are maintained on platforms.

In this steamy atmosphere, McQuay places a story consisting of elements that are none too original. There's the bastard son of the dying Governor of Alb'ny, raised as a simple platform farmer, and the legitimate son, who is named Ramon; for that, if no other reason, you know he is not going to win any prizes for upright behavior. And the lovely but low-born peasant girl who is ruined by Ramon's retainers, but helps the hero escape from the dungeon and, as an encore, bears him twins. (Because they *look* like him, that's why.)

There's the Queen Mother (or is it Governess Mother in this case?) who has hated and feared the bastard all her life, and her lover, who is the High Priest. (The priests are called Programmers, and they worship [Are you ready?] the great god Ibem. Kipsie is their holy city of the Lawgivers.)

The terrain is crawling with the descendants of genetically engineered humans, called Genies, who seem to come in all shapes and sizes and hair colors (even light brown) and endless varieties. (Every time the going gets dull, McQuay pulls a new subspecies out of a hat.) Some of them are maintaining a secret center of technology deep in the jungle.

Need I go on? McQuay keeps the

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story and the invention moving right along; the basics aren't all that original, but, as noted, he keeps coming up with new elements when things threaten to bog down. And though he's not the most polished of writers, and the prose gets a bit purple at times, it's bearable if your goal is simple entertainment.

Darker Than You Think

By Jack Williamson

Bluejay, $8.95 (paper)

Jack Williamson's *Darker Than You Think* (first published in 1940 in magazine form, and in 1948 in book form) was one of the premiere attempts to give a rational, "scientific" basis to witchcraft in general and lycanthropy in particular. It was unusual for its time, not only in its subject matter, but for its "dark" ending in a period and from an editor (John W. Campbell) notable for their firm promulgation of mankind's value and superiority (non-human races could be sympathetic and helpful, but man would almost always lead the way for the Universe). The conclusion anticipates, by two score years, that of *Rosemary's Baby* which was a shocker in its time.

Newspaperman Will Barbee meets a scientific expedition returning from the heart of Asia with discoveries that will alert humanity to a great danger in its midst, or so says its leader. Unfortunately, he dies as he is revealing this dire warning to the press, as do several other expedition members over the next few days.

Will, who knows them all personally, dreams that he is responsible for each death as it happens. In his dreams he is acompanied by an impossibly beautiful woman he has met at the first press conference and the deaths are accomplished by the two of them in the shapes of various animals (she a wolf bitch; he, variously, a wolf, a giant serpent, a saber-tooth tiger). Of course they are not dreams. The basic premise is that there was another "human" race concurrent with early man. These cousins developed, as a survival mechanism, powers based on the manipulation of probability and the ability to "project" themselves mentally as animals.

Despite these powers, homo sapiens gradually won out over "homo lycanthropus," but there was interbreeding, and the "witch" strain became a recessive strain in humanity, cropping up frequently enough to keep the traditions alive.

It had always been all out war between the races, but now two factors are all important: the expedition had found a sure-fire weapon used successfully by ancient man, and a full blooded member of the witch breed has been bred out of humanity, and is about to come into his full powers. Will finds himself in the middle of all this, more deeply than he can imagine.

Darker Than You Think is now superficially a bit old-fashioned; the writing is of the pulp school,

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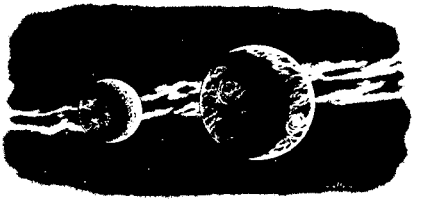
speedy, dismissive of details, and sometimes fudging logic a bit. Nevertheless, it's still a brilliantly original novel; the seeds of many others are in it, but it has a distinct flavor of its own, one that is indeed, darker than you think. This new edition, with its handsome woodcut-style illustrations by David G. Klein, is welcome.

Shoptalk . . . What pleasure to announce the republication of Jane Gaskell's *Atlan* series, beginning with *The Serpent* (DAW, $2.95, paper). These absolutely extraordinary fantasies have never found the audience they deserve; first published in the 1960s, they antedate the current vogue in fantasy and owe allegiance to no predecessor. They are, in their way, as original as the works of Tolkien and Peake; they are also outrageous and action-packed, adult, and a breakthrough for the female as hero. Taking place in a fantastical prehistoric South America ("before the moon fell") of dinosaurs and ape men, and the mysterious offshore island kingdom of Atlan, forever guarded by a zone of impenetrable silence, the five novels chronicle the adventures of Cija, raised by her mother, Dictatress of a small kingdom, to believe herself a goddess. Swept into the war between the two great Empires of the continent with her reptilian lover, Zerd, Cija is an antediluvian Becky Sharpe who goes from courtesan to scullery-maid to Empress and back again. There are scenes of vivid beauty, and others that are not for the squeamish—I remember particularly a banquet featuring a live dinosaur as the *piece de resistance.* The other novels are *The Dragon, Atlan, The City,* and *Some Summer Lands*—they will be appearing periodically over the year.

Fans of the classic *Space Merchants* will be surprised and pleased to hear that Frederick Pohl has after, lo, these many years, given us a sequel. It's called *The Merchants' War* (St. Martin's Press, $13.95).

Recent publications from those associated with this magazine include: *Young Extraterrestrials* edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin Greenberg, and Charles Waugh (Harper, $7.95, paper).

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, % The Science Fiction Shop, 56 8th Ave., New York, N.Y. 10014. ●



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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

There's just time to hit a few cons before the exam-season lull sets in. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists, and fellow fans. For a later, longer list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 (long) envelope) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. (703) 273–6111 is the hot line. If a machine answers, leave your area code & number. I'll call back on my nickel. Send an SASE when writing cons. When phoning, identify yourself. For free listings, tell me about your con 6 months ahead. Look for me at cons with the iridescent "Filthy Pierre" badge.

APRIL, 1985

12–14—**DeltaCon.** For info, write: **Box 640205, Kenner LA 70064.** Or phone: **(703) 273–6111** (10 am to 10 pm only, not collect). Con will be held in: Kenner (near New Orleans) LA (if city omitted, same as in address) at the Travelodge. Guests will include: Jo (Diadem) Clayton, Mike Resnick, John Guidry, Jim Mule, R. K. Barclay, G. Bennett, C. Duval. Partial emphasis on Gothics (as well as SF).

17–23—**Semaine de la SF et de L'Imaginaire, c/o Rhone-Alpes SF, Centre Pierre Mendes-France, 12 Ave. de Paris, Roanne 42300, France.** This is the fourth annual science fiction week held there.

19–21—**Fantasy. Worlds Festival. Hyatt Hotel, Oakland CA.** Madeleine L'Engle, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Diana Paxson, Paul Edwin Zimmer, Judy Gerjuoy. Masquerade. A "Friends of Darkover" con.

26–28—**Space Development Conference, c/o L5 Society, 6812 Wilson Lane, Bethesda MD 20817.** In Washington DC. The annual L5 con. Theme: "Returns from Space." Membership $40 and up for non-L5ers.

26–28—**Alti-Ego's, Box 261000, Lakewood CO 80266.** Denver CO. Anne (Pern) McCaffrey, Ed Bryant, Real & Muff Musgrave, Hap Henricksen, Mary Mason. Balrog awards. Contests: costume, model, art, writing, video. Workshops: acting, theater, technical, costuming. Medieval fighting demos (SCA).

MAY, 1985

4–5—**Sky Con, % Super Giant Books, 38 Wall St., Asheville NC 28801.** At the Inn on the Plaza.

10–11—**LASFaS 50, 11513 Burbank Blvd., N. Hollywood CA 91601.** Fifty years of the LA SF Society.

10–12—**MarCon, Box 14078, Columbus OH 43214.** Larry Niven. Masquerade. A traditional Midwest con.

17–19—**ConQuest, Box 36212, Kansas City MO 64111.** G. R. R. Martin, Algis Budrys, C. J. Cherryh, Wm. Wu, W. A. (Bob) Tucker, R. & J. Coulson, W. Norwood, M. McQuay, G. Cook, R. Chilson, R. Bailey.

JULY, 1985

3–7—**WesterCon 38, 4812 Folsom Blvd. #125, Sacramento CA 95819. (916) 481–8753.** West's big con.

AUGUST, 1985

22–26—**AussieCon Two, 11863 W. Jefferson Blvd. #1, Culver City CA 90230.** Melbourne, Australia. The WorldCon for 1985. Gene (New Sun) Wolfe, editor/fan Ted White. Guests too numerous to mention.

30–Sep. 2—**ChiliCon, Box 9612, Austin TX 78766.** The North American SF Interim Con for 1985.

AUGUST, 1986

28–Sep. 1—**ConFederation, 2500 N. Atlanta #1986, Smyrna GA 30080. (404) 438–3943.** Atlanta GA. Ray ("Martian Chronicles") Bradbury, fan/editor Terry Carr, Bob (Slow Glass) Shaw. The WorldCon.

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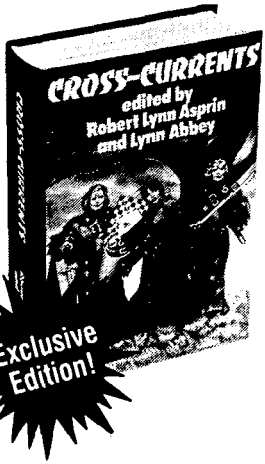

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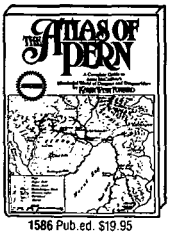

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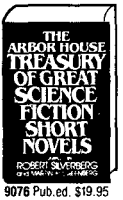

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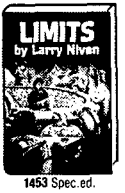

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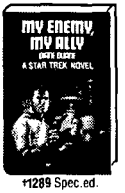

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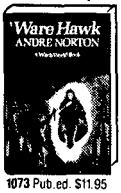

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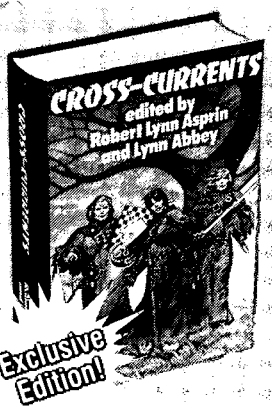

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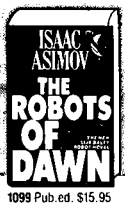

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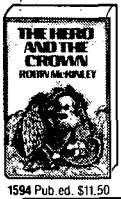

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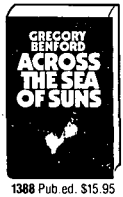

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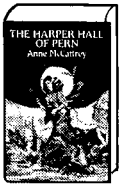

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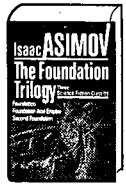

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